

BLACK SLUICE INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

MINUTES

of the proceedings of a meeting of the Executive Committee

held at the offices of the Board on
2nd June 2026 at 14.00

Members

Chairperson - * Mr P Holmes

* Cllr P Bedford
* Mr M Leggott
* Mr R Needham

* Mr M Rollinson
* Mr C Wray
* Cllr S Evans

* Member Present

In attendance: Mr D Withnall (Chief Executive)
Mr P Nicholson (Projects Director)

2710 Recording the Meeting - Agenda Item 1

Committee members were informed that the meeting would be recorded.

2711 Apologies for absence - Agenda Item 2

There were no apologies.

The Chairperson welcomed Cllr S Evans to his first Executive Committee meeting.

2712 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3

There were no declarations of interest.

2713 Minutes of the Meeting - Agenda Item 4

Minutes of the meeting held on 21st January 2026, copies of which had been circulated, were considered and it was AGREED that they should be signed as a true record.

2714 Confidential Minutes of the meeting - Agenda Item 5

Confidential Minutes of the meeting held on 21st January 2026, copies of which had been circulated, were considered and it was AGREED that they should be signed as a true record.

2715 Matters Arising - Agenda Item 6

- Minute 2579 Original Minute 2517 Cooks Lock Investigation
The minute Numbered 2517 should be with the numeral One and be 2517. The minutes will be corrected and re-signed.
- Minute 2579 Original Minute 2518 Management Accounts
The CEO pointed out the two maps in the Board room illustrate the extent of work completed in last year's cutting season. Plus the areas that were not completed and the reasons for that.
- Minute 2579 Original Minute 2520 Cliff Beck Maintenance
There is an incorrect spelling of Handley Chase.
- Minute 2581 2026/27 Budget and Ten-Year Estimates
The Chief Executive confirmed that a meter has now been successfully installed at the depot for the EE mast, enabling accurate measurement of electricity usage going forward. It was further reported that a settlement has been reached with the relevant operator, identified as EE MBNL or ZTP, covering outstanding electricity consumption dating back to 2016, representing approximately ten years of historic usage. Following negotiations, a total settlement figure of £45,000 was agreed and has now been received in full.
- Minute 2581 2026/27 Budget and Ten-Year Estimates
The Chief Executive drew attention to the final paragraph of the report for the purposes of the minutes, confirming that approval had previously been granted by email for expenditure of £154,000 to undertake the concreting works. He further noted that consideration would be given going forward to the potential development of a building, currently envisaged as a temporary structure with a lifespan of up to 25 years.

In relation to the IDB fund, the Chief Executive explained that the financial position does not represent a surplus in the traditional sense, but rather reflects internal costs, specifically the allocation of officer time. It was clarified that while this time has not been directly attributed as an external cost, it is not considered an additional expense to the organisation, as these officers are already employed. Consequently, any unallocated service value has effectively been transferred into reserves. However, the Chief Executive advised that he was not yet in a position to confirm that all IDB fund matters had been finalised or to provide a definitive statement of remaining balances, and undertook to report further once final figures are available.

The Chairman queried whether the position could be described as a surplus on the IDB fund, and this was clarified as above. He also advised that he and the Chief Executive had recently reviewed the concreting works on site, and suggested that, weather permitting, members could take a brief opportunity following the meeting to don high-visibility clothing and visit the site, in order to observe the works firsthand and gain a clearer understanding of both the scope and rationale for the project.

- Minute 2581 2026/27 Budget and Ten-Year Estimates
A Pumping Station Caretaker has been employed. He is in post, is proactive and appears to be settling in well

- Minute 2581 2026/27 Budget and Ten-Year Estimates

The Chief Executive reported that work is currently underway to migrate all organisational data storage to SharePoint, representing a significant step towards modernising internal systems. It was explained that this transition will facilitate a range of electronic working practices, including the introduction of digital timesheets for operational staff, electronic holiday request processes, and the implementation of work planning tools such as electronic work boards. In addition, longer-term ordering processes are intended to be automated, replacing the existing manual triplicate order book system. The Chief Executive confirmed that these improvements are currently in progress and continue to be actively developed.

- Minute 2583 5G Telemetry Upgrade

The Chief Executive updated that the 4G/5G/Starlink upgrade to the telemetry system has been successfully funded through the IDB Recovery Fund. It was emphasised that this expenditure has not been drawn from the pumping station maintenance budget, and the surplus has therefore been allocated to the general reserve.

- Minute 2585 AOB RSPB Frampton Marsh

The Chief Executive provided an update regarding the Board's support to the RSPB, confirming that pumps and associated equipment had been loaned to assist with water management at the site. The total cost of this work was reported as £5,626, which was noted to be in line with the budget. Members were shown before-and-after images illustrating the impact of the works, demonstrating the successful restoration of water levels. The Chief Executive added that he had visited the site on several occasions and reported that RSPB staff were extremely appreciative of the assistance, noting that the intervention had helped ensure sufficient water was available to sustain the habitat through the summer months. It was also observed that the site had previously dried out completely in October of the preceding year.

Members discussed the ongoing condition of the site, particularly in relation to recent dry weather. It was acknowledged that some water loss through evaporation would be expected, however it was confirmed that the RSPB's own pumps are now fully operational, enabling them to maintain water levels effectively going forward. The Chairman expressed confidence that the upgraded pumping arrangements would allow the site to cope with such conditions.

Further discussion took place regarding the scale of water movement achieved during the project. It was explained that while the pumping was not continuous, particularly towards the latter stages due to environmental considerations such as nesting birds, significant volumes of water were transferred over an extended period. In practice, water was sometimes redistributed between areas of the site, such as to adjacent swales, before being replenished by the pumping works. Members noted that the operation required sustained pumping activity over a period of several days and weeks in order to achieve the desired water levels.

It was also suggested that a future environmental meeting could be held at the RSPB visitor centre, where suitable facilities are available. Members considered that this would provide an opportunity to review the site in more detail and observe the outcomes of the works firsthand, with the expectation that the RSPB would be pleased to host and present the improvements achieved.

- Minute 2585 AOB The Quadrant

The Chief Executive introduced discussion on the Quadrant works, noting that the matter appeared to have been ongoing for a significant period, extending back several years without completion. It was assumed that the original works had not been undertaken. The Projects Director confirmed this position and advised that recent progress had been made, including a site meeting held in mid-May with Chestnut Homes, who have now expressed a clear intention for the works to proceed and for the Board to undertake them.

It was reported that engagement with other stakeholders is ongoing, including Wyberton Playing Fields, who have been advised that their preferred timing for the works, specifically outside of the football season, will not be achievable. The Projects Director explained that the required bushing works must take place within a defined seasonal window which overlaps with the football season, and this constraint cannot be avoided. As part of the preparatory work, environmental surveys are being arranged, with an initial site visit scheduled to undertake a bird nesting survey and a vegetation and drainage water assessment, followed by a further survey in August. It was noted that certain surveys, particularly those relating to bird nesting, must be undertaken within a very short timeframe immediately prior to the works commencing, in order to ensure compliance with environmental regulations.

Members discussed the timing constraints in more detail, recognising that while the bushing works fall outside the bird nesting season, all necessary surveys must still be completed in advance as part of due diligence. It was agreed that, subject to survey outcomes, the earliest feasible timeframe for undertaking the bushing works would be early autumn, likely September or October. The Projects Director advised that, under this programme, the associated drainage works would then follow in the subsequent year, provisionally April or May, subject to suitable weather conditions.

The Projects Director further confirmed that Chestnut Homes had been provided with a cost estimate of £55,000 for the works. While this figure had been agreed previously, it was noted that there will be a requirement to review the cost to reflect the passage of time and potential changes in circumstances, which Chestnut Homes have indicated they will be willing to accept. Reference was made to earlier discussions regarding different delivery options and associated risks, including potential delays, and it was confirmed that these considerations have already been outlined to the client.

The Chairman remarked that the matter felt repetitive, noting that it has re-emerged periodically over recent years without resolution. However, the Projects Director emphasised that Chestnut Homes are now aware of their obligations, as the works form part of their planning requirements, and that they are actively seeking to move forward with the project and appoint the Board to deliver it.

2716 To receive the 2025/26 accounts - Agenda Item 7

The Chief Executive advised that he would not review each item in detail but invited questions from members as the discussion progressed. He highlighted that interest income continues to perform significantly above previous years and is currently £41,000 higher than originally budgeted. Although income from Brewin Dolphin investments is below expectations by £6,600, this is more than

offset by the increased interest earnings, resulting in a net positive position of approximately £34,000.

The Chief Executive further reported that £4,704,000 of Flood Defence Grant in Aid had been received during the previous financial year, noting that this position would be explored further within the balance sheet. He reiterated that the £45,000 relating to electricity charges for the EE mast represented a one-off receipt, and confirmed that, following installation of the meter, future charges would be invoiced accurately based on readings. It was also confirmed that £90,000 previously ring-fenced within the pumping station maintenance budget for the 4G and 5G telemetry upgrade has now been transferred into reserves.

Attention was drawn to areas of underspend, including £98,000 on desilting works, £24,500 on bushing works, and the absence of culvert surveying activity during the previous year, although this has now commenced. Administrative salaries were reported as £36,000 under budget, largely due to the non-appointment of a Project Manager. Members queried the level of underspend, noting the variance against budget expectations. The Chief Executive responded that both underspend and overspend are matters of concern, explaining that in part the position reflects prioritisation of IDB-funded works over the Board's own maintenance activities, an issue which will need to be addressed moving forward.

It was reported that approximately 66% of planned desilting has now been completed. Some of the underspend was attributed to efficiencies arising from revised working methods, particularly the adoption of a more environmentally sensitive approach to desilting, whereby works are undertaken with water remaining in the drain rather than through traditional damming and dewatering. While this method has reduced costs and improved efficiency, it was acknowledged that it may not deliver the same level of thoroughness, potentially requiring more frequent future maintenance. The Projects Director confirmed that this approach reflects compliance with environmental regulations and guidance from the Board's Environment Officer.

Members discussed the balance between efficiency and completeness of work, recognising that the underspend results both from efficiencies achieved and from work not completed due to operational constraints such as high water levels and restricted working windows. It was also noted that environmental restrictions limit the periods during which such works can be undertaken, reducing flexibility where delays occur. The Chairman commented that operational pressures, including the need to deliver funded works within strict timescales, had contributed to prioritisation decisions.

The Chief Executive confirmed that tighter planning and monitoring of work programmes would be implemented going forward. Turning to the balance sheet, he reported that funds held with NatWest had increased from £4.7 million in the previous year to £7.2 million, representing an increase of approximately £2.5 million, with further detail to be provided in relation to specific schemes. The Chairman queried the level of interest being achieved on these balances, and it was noted that rates of approximately 1.16% to 2% were currently being obtained on account with our bank, instead of being invested with external organisations.

This prompted discussion regarding potential alternative banking arrangements, with suggestions that higher interest rates may be available elsewhere, including through agricultural or specialist banks such as Oxbury. It was noted, however, that the Board's current financial regulations restrict investments and limit the amount that can be placed with any single provider. The Chief Executive confirmed that these regulations could be reviewed and amended by the Board if desired, although practical considerations such as anti-money laundering requirements and administrative burdens were highlighted. It was agreed that further informal enquiries would be made into alternative options.

The performance of Brewin Dolphin investments was also discussed, with the Chief Executive noting that although valuations had appeared negative at the end of March, they had since recovered. Market volatility was attributed to wider geopolitical factors, and it was confirmed that the Board's investment portfolios remain aligned, both operating at a medium risk level. Members observed that maintaining a balanced portfolio of interest-bearing accounts and investment assets remains a prudent approach in the current economic climate.

(a) Period 12 Management Accounts

The committee noted the Period 12 Management Accounts.

(b) 2025 / 26 Schemes Report

The Chief Executive introduced the schemes report and invited the Projects Director to provide further detail, highlighting several key points in advance. He confirmed that embankment works are currently underway, with members having observed progress during recent committee site visits. He also noted that discussions are ongoing with the contractor, Jacksons, and the engineering consultants, Stantec, regarding a delayed start to works, which the contractor has raised as a potential compensation event.

An update was provided on the Chain Bridge and Donington North Ings schemes, confirming that tenders have been issued and returned, with evaluation currently in progress.

The Projects Director reported that overall progress on schemes funded through the IDB Recovery Fund is behind the original target, with some works not completed by the intended 31 March deadline. It was emphasised that these delays are largely due to factors beyond the Board's control. Progress on electrical upgrades was noted as positive, with new power supplies now installed at several pumping stations, including South Kyme and Ewerby, and arrangements in place for Dunsby Fen. These upgrades will enable the installation of new motors and control panels, with works at some sites dependent on completion of contractor activities currently underway.

Further detail was provided on delays to the Jacksons contracts, particularly relating to access issues at Trinity College, which have led to a claim for additional costs of approximately £500,000. This claim is currently being disputed, with the Board maintaining that access delays were significantly shorter than those cited by the contractor. It was confirmed that the Board does not have

sufficient contingency within the scheme budget to accommodate such a claim, and that clarity will be required urgently, as continuation of works may not be financially viable if the claim is upheld.

The Projects Director also outlined progress on refurbishment schemes at Chain Bridge and Donington North Ings, which involve comprehensive upgrades including new pumps, motors, control systems, and associated electrical infrastructure. These works will also include relocation of transformers, which will subsequently be transferred to National Grid ownership, removing future liability from the Board. Tender processes for these schemes are nearing completion, with works expected to be delivered primarily during the summer of 2027.

Members discussed the implications of delays in relation to grant funding requirements. It was confirmed that audits are expected to be undertaken shortly, although it was noted that such inspections may have limited value once works are complete. Assurance was given that funding agreements only permit clawback of unspent funds, and the Board has taken care to ensure that eligible expenditure is maximised within programme constraints.

Discussion also reflected on the challenging delivery timeframe associated with the funding programme, which was originally highly ambitious. The Projects Director noted that delays have been particularly influenced by external factors such as utility connections, with equipment in many cases ready for installation but awaiting final enabling works. Members acknowledged that while such delays are frustrating, they are largely unavoidable.

Concerns were raised regarding the contractor's claim for additional costs, with members questioning whether favourable weather conditions and resource allocation could have mitigated delays. It was suggested that the contractor's approach to staffing and site management may have contributed to inefficiencies. The Chief Executive emphasised the need for the Board to remain commercially aware in its negotiations, noting that while contractors operate on a profit basis, the Board must ensure that it does not accept unreasonable cost increases, particularly given its limited financial flexibility compared to larger public bodies.

(c) Draft 2025/ 26 Unaudited Financial Statements

The Chief Executive introduced the financial statements, advising that while these are not usually reviewed in detail, there were a small number of items requiring Board awareness and decision. Prior to substantive discussion, members raised minor corrections within the document, including inaccuracies in names and committee roles, which were noted for amendment. It was also highlighted that page numbering differed between printed packs and PDF versions, creating potential confusion. The Chief Executive confirmed that, once administrative capacity allows, future papers will be compiled digitally to ensure consistent pagination across formats.

A wider discussion followed regarding the format and distribution of Board papers. Members expressed mixed preferences for digital and printed copies, with some favouring electronic access for convenience and record-keeping, while others preferred paper for ease of annotation and use during meetings. It was

agreed that both formats would continue to be provided to accommodate individual preferences. The cost implications of printing and distribution were considered, with the Chief Executive confirming that postage represents the most significant expense, with total distribution costs estimated at approximately £4 per member, or around £100 per Board meeting. It was noted that printing papers for collection at meetings would reduce costs, and one member indicated a preference to move to digital-only circulation.

Turning to accounting policies, the Chief Executive drew attention to proposed changes relating to asset valuation. He explained that a previous indicative quotation of £500 for revaluation in 2021 had not been invoiced, and that a current quotation of £2,850 had now been received due to the requirement for a full on-site reassessment following the retirement of the previous valuer. In light of this, he proposed that the Board adopt a consistent approach with pumping stations by retaining nominal values within the accounts rather than commissioning a costly revaluation. It was clarified that any such revaluation would have no material operational impact, affecting only the fixed asset and capital reserve figures within internal, unaudited accounts.

Members supported the principle of avoiding unnecessary expenditure, although it was suggested that periodic revaluation, potentially on a ten-year cycle, could represent good governance practice. It was acknowledged, however, that asset values recorded for accounting purposes differ from those required for insurance or disposal, and that valuations could instead be commissioned as required for specific purposes. On this basis, it was agreed that the proposed approach represented a pragmatic and proportionate use of resources.

The Chief Executive also provided an update on the pension valuation, noting that the latest figures had been received subsequent to preparation of the accounts. These indicated an increase in the pension surplus from £1,471,000 to £1,881,000, representing a positive movement of approximately £410,000 over the year. It was confirmed that this adjustment would be reflected in the finalised accounts, with corresponding changes to both the liability and pension reserve entries, and an updated net asset position for the Board.

2517 To receive the 2025/26 Annual Internal Audit Report - Agenda Item 8

The Chairman introduced the internal audit report, noting that members would have had the opportunity to review the document. He expressed his appreciation, on behalf of the Executive Committee and the Board, for the outcome of the audit, which had again resulted in a rating of substantial assurance. Members acknowledged that this represents a strong position and is not consistently achieved across all drainage boards, with it being noted that the Board had previously been the only authority to achieve this level of assurance.

The Chief Executive highlighted that, while the report was largely positive, it did include one recommendation relating to procurement procedures. Specifically, the recommendation concerned the enforcement of obtaining three written quotations for expenditure between £2,000 and £20,000. He confirmed that this matter had already been considered by the Audit and Risk Committee, and that a revised procurement policy is currently being developed. This new policy is intended to provide a practical and proportionate framework, incorporating a

balance between operational flexibility and appropriate governance, and will be presented to the full Board for approval in due course.

Members noted that the recommendation represented a low-priority matter and supported the action being taken to address it. It was acknowledged that the issue had arisen from a procedural oversight but that it is now being properly reviewed and strengthened. The Chairman confirmed that further detail would be provided in due course when the revised policy is brought forward for formal consideration by the Board.

2518 Pumping Station Refurb Programme & Pumping Station Reserve Agenda Item 9

The Chief Executive introduced proposals focused on future planning, specifically a comprehensive pumping station refurbishment programme and the creation of a new pumping station reserve, subject to Board approval. It was explained that a detailed programme has been developed covering all 34 pumping stations, with two sites identified for full replacement rather than refurbishment. The proposed approach involves undertaking complete, whole-scale refurbishments, including installation of more environmentally sensitive pumps, upgraded mechanical and electrical components, and all associated infrastructure works, with the exception of the building structures themselves. This represents a move away from the current piecemeal capital works approach towards a more strategic, long-term investment programme.

The Chief Executive further explained that changes to Flood Defence Grant in Aid funding now require financial contributions from the Board for certain replacement schemes, where project costs exceed £3 million. In such cases, a contribution of approximately 10% is required on the excess above this threshold. It was also noted that contributions may be necessary in some areas to improve the prioritisation of schemes within the national funding allocation process. To address this, the proposal includes the establishment of a dedicated reserve, funded through savings generated by reducing short-term capital works, thereby enabling the Board to accumulate sufficient funds to support future scheme contributions.

It was reported that the planned programme would involve the comprehensive refurbishment of two to three pumping stations per year, with an estimated total investment of approximately £68 million, rising to around £88 million when including replacement schemes such as Swineshead and Bicker Eau. The Chairman highlighted the likely requirement for the Board to contribute approximately £1.4 million in total towards these larger schemes, reinforcing the importance of establishing the proposed reserve. It was confirmed that approximately £3.6 million could be redirected from existing short-term capital allocations to support this strategy.

The Chairman placed on record his thanks to officers involved in developing the proposal, recognising the significant work undertaken in preparing a long-term, structured plan. The Projects Director noted that the proposal reflects the current uncertainty surrounding future funding arrangements and emphasised that having an available contribution will improve the Board's ability to secure external funding by making its schemes more competitive within the allocation process.

Members discussed the broader strategic implications, including whether a more fundamental redesign of the drainage network should be considered over the long term, potentially reducing the number of pumping stations and creating larger, more efficient assets. It was acknowledged that, while such an approach may be desirable in principle, the financial and practical constraints currently faced by the Board make this unachievable at present. Instead, the proposed refurbishment programme was considered the most realistic and effective approach to maintaining operational resilience over the next 15 to 20 years.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the proposal had been reviewed by the internal auditor, who was satisfied that it would not compromise the Board's governance or assurance standards. Members expressed general support for the proposal, recognising the need to address ageing infrastructure, and it was agreed that the recommendation would be taken forward to the full Board for formal approval.

2519 To review and approve accounts of Bourne Fen Farm Account – Agenda Item 10

The Chief Executive provided a brief update on the Bourne Farm Trust Fund, confirming that the Board has continued to apply the same rate contribution of 2.4 pence in the pound, unchanged since 2009. It was reported that the fund has resulted in a small surplus of £123 for the year. Based on this outcome, the Chief Executive concluded that the decision taken in January to maintain the contribution at its current level for a further year was appropriate

2520 To receive an update on 2026/27 Budgets – Agenda Item 11

(a) Updated 2026/27 10-year Schemes Budget

The Chief Executive introduced Item 11, noting that the key elements had already been addressed within earlier reports. He explained that the figures presented in red represent amounts carried forward from the schemes report, while the figures highlighted in purple and peach relate specifically to the proposed pumping station refurbishment programme, replacement schemes, and the establishment of the pumping station reserve.

It was highlighted that the most significant figure within this section is the projected total programme value of approximately £97.7 million over the period covered, representing the scale of planned scheme delivery. Members noted that this represents a substantial increase compared to previous years, particularly when considered against the Board's position only a few years ago, when annual turnover was approximately £2 million. The scale of this increase was acknowledged as a major step change in the Board's operational and financial activity.

Members recognised the magnitude of the programme and the associated uplift in delivery expectations, and indicated general acceptance of the figures as presented.

(b) Updated 2026/27 10-year plant Replacement Budget

The Chief Executive presented the updated plant replacement plan, noting that he had made minor amendments to the version previously approved by the Board

in January. He explained that the plan had shown a negative position at the end of the previous financial year, however this had now been addressed through two key adjustments.

Firstly, the operational lifespan of the ride on mower has been extended to nine years, reflecting the performance and longevity achieved by its predecessor. Secondly, allowance has been included for the introduction of an electric floor sweeper, which is required to meet health and safety obligations relating to dust control and site cleanliness.

As a result of these revisions, the Chief Executive confirmed that the updated plan now shows a positive financial position over the next ten-year period. He emphasised that this represents only a slight amendment to the previously approved budget, but provides greater long-term stability within the plant replacement programme.

(c) Updated 10-year estimates

The Chief Executive presented the ten-year financial estimates, drawing attention to the inclusion of the proposed pumping station reserve, identified within the schedule, and outlining how this integrates with the wider capital and maintenance programme. He highlighted that the targeted closing balance at the end of the ten-year period is £1,811,622. It was noted that this includes an available margin of approximately £602,000 over the 10-year period, which will provide flexibility for future planning.

The Chief Executive advised that decisions regarding the use of this surplus, including potential allocation towards pump and bowser storage or other initiatives, will be considered at a later stage once there is greater clarity on the final position of the IDB Recovery Fund.

Members sought clarification on specific expenditure lines, including solar-related costs. The Chief Executive explained that these relate primarily to the replacement of inverters and ongoing subscription costs associated with monitoring systems. It was noted that expenditure in this area has been relatively limited in the current year, with some higher costs incurred in the previous year due to issues at specific sites. Members observed that such costs are generally infrequent and can be reasonably managed within long-term budgeting assumptions, although it was suggested that periodic maintenance, such as cleaning of panels, may improve performance and returns.

2521 CONFIDENTIAL: HR Updates - Agenda Item 12

CONFIDENTIAL – Review of Personnel Matters.

It was agreed and thereby RESOLVED to exclude the public from the next part of the meeting due to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.

2522 Employee Assistance Programme - Agenda Item 13

The Chief Executive introduced a proposal following the earlier HR update, recommending the adoption of an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) to provide structured support to employees. He explained that, while the Board already makes use of occupational health services, the proposed programme would offer a more comprehensive and proactive approach, addressing a broader range of issues that may affect employees' wellbeing and performance. These include matters such as stress, anxiety, financial concerns, legal issues and access to counselling, all of which can impact an individual's ability to focus and operate effectively at work.

It was noted that several occupational health referrals had been made during the past year, highlighting the increasing need for additional support mechanisms. The Chief Executive outlined that the proposed EAP would complement existing arrangements by providing both preventative and responsive support, including early intervention where employees report sickness absence, and confidential access to services such as counselling and cognitive behavioural therapy. The proposal also includes ongoing development of mental health first aid provision, with training for two additional staff per year, strengthening internal capacity to support wellbeing across the workforce.

Members were presented with a comparison of three potential schemes, including a basic employee assistance offer, a combined wellbeing and reimbursement-based scheme, and a more comprehensive package delivering both employee support and organisational benefits. The Chief Executive recommended the Health Assured "Wisdom Wellbeing" option as the preferred solution, citing its broader scope, including occupational health integration, early intervention processes, and enhanced support mechanisms for both employees and management.

Discussion highlighted that the adoption of such a scheme would not only support employee wellbeing but would also strengthen the Board's position as a responsible employer, including in potential employment-related matters, by demonstrating that appropriate support mechanisms are in place and actively promoted. Members noted that the cost of the scheme was modest in comparison to the potential benefits, both in terms of workforce wellbeing and organisational resilience.

The Chairman invited member views, and support was expressed for proceeding with the proposal. It was noted that similar schemes have been introduced within other drainage boards, reinforcing the appropriateness of the approach. Members acknowledged that the key consideration was the selection of the most suitable scheme, rather than whether to implement one at all.

It was proposed and agreed that the Board adopt the Health Assured "Wisdom Wellbeing" package. During discussion, a query was raised regarding whistleblowing arrangements, and it was confirmed that existing procedures remain in place, with concerns typically routed through the Chief Executive or, where appropriate, independently to Internal Auditor. It was noted that this area

may be reviewed further alongside implementation of the new scheme to ensure sufficient confidentiality and accessibility.

The Chairman concluded the discussion by thanking the Chief Executive for the comprehensive report and recommended option, noting the Committee's approval of the proposal.

2523 Any Other Business – Agenda Item 14

(a) Health & Safety Update

The Chairman invited an update from Mark Leggott, the Board's representative on the Health and Safety Committee, who advised that he would be unable to attend the forthcoming meeting and therefore wished to raise two points for consideration.

Firstly, he reported feedback received from a recent chainsaw assessment event, where assessors had expressed concerns regarding the suitability of high-visibility clothing worn by candidates. Specifically, the use of high-visibility vests with Velcro fastenings was highlighted as a potential safety risk, as these have, in some cases, become detached during operation. As a result, it has been recommended that candidates undertaking such assessments should instead wear zip-fastened high-visibility garments or alternative clothing without loose or detachable elements. It was noted that this represents a relatively minor adjustment but one that promotes improved safety standards, and members were asked to be mindful of this requirement moving forward.

Secondly, the member raised concerns regarding protocols for Board members visiting operational sites, particularly pumping stations. He referred to a recent personal experience at another authority, where an unannounced visit to a pumping station while it was operational, without appropriate personal protective equipment, had resulted in a tightening of their health and safety procedures. These now include requirements for advance notification of visits and the use of appropriate safety equipment, as well as physical barriers and signage to restrict access to operational areas.

In response, the Chief Executive noted that the Board's pumping stations are generally not continuously staffed, although some maintenance activities, such as manual raking, do still occur. The Chairman acknowledged that there have been previous instances of Board members interacting directly with operational staff and site operations, and emphasised the importance of maintaining clear boundaries and adherence to appropriate procedures. Members recognised the need to ensure that health and safety protocols are consistently applied, including for Board members, and that any necessary guidance or clarification should be reinforced going forward.

(b) Special Leave Entitlement

The Chairman introduced a matter relating to the Chief Executive's ongoing voluntary service with the RAF Air Cadets. It was noted that the Chief Executive has a long-standing involvement, having previously served as a member of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve until December 2017, at which point the status changed to the Royal Air Force Air Cadets. It was confirmed that, despite this change in designation, the nature of the role and associated duties has remained unchanged.

The Chief Executive explained that, under the Board's "White Book" terms and conditions, the previous reserve role had attracted an entitlement of ten days' special leave, whereas the current cadet volunteer status formally permits only five days. However, it was noted that a previous Chairman had supported continuation of the ten-day allowance on the basis that the responsibilities undertaken remained consistent before and after the change in status.

The matter was brought forward to the current Chairman for consideration, following receipt of correspondence expressing appreciation for the Board's support of the Chief Executive's voluntary contribution. Members discussed the position and recognised both the value of the voluntary work undertaken and the reputational and wider benefits associated with supporting such activities.

The Chairman proposed that the existing arrangement be maintained, allowing the Chief Executive to continue to receive ten days' special leave for this purpose rather than the five days specified within current policy. Members expressed their support for this approach, acknowledging the importance of retaining consistency with previous arrangements. It was therefore agreed that the Board would continue to support the Chief Executive in this capacity and maintain the existing level of special leave entitlement.

(c) Yard Inspection

After the meeting the Executive Committee completed an inspection of the area to be concreted in the depot. The Committee Members were able to see the extent of the work that is being carried out for the depot improvements.

There being no further business the meeting closed at **15:49**