CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

26th June 2025

COUNCILLOR SANDRA SQUIRE - CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND COASTAL

For the period to 16th June 2025

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

I have quite a lot I'd like to report on this month, so please bear with me.

Beach Pollution

We have dealt with the immediate aftermath and the number of plastic nurdles being collected from our beaches has dropped for the time being. Although a lot of nurdle pollution has been collected from the shoreline, some still remains, with Scolt Head Island to be cleaned in the Autumn. Our officers continue to meet with stakeholders and other agencies, although this will be less going forwards.

As the response moves into different phase, we continue to support landowners and have provided skips and equipment for continued nurdle collection. Larger pieces of nurdle mats can still be reported if found here: Report a coastal issue | Report a coastal issue | Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk

On Monday 9th June we held a Thank You event at the Town Hall for those involved with the beach clean up response.

It was important the herculean efforts to clean our beaches were recognised. I've never received so many emails and messages from across West Norfolk thanking our staff for all of their efforts.

The response involved a lot of people from both the council and other agencies, all playing a valuable part, so bringing them together for some tea and cake really seemed like the least we could do.

From the emergency planning team, to public open space, the comms team, environmental health, the waste team, those who held the fort while colleagies were on the beaches, the MCA, Kings Lynn Conservancy Board, the RSPB and other landowners and stakeholders, the beach clean up was a great example of West Norfolk pulling together a great collaborative effort.

We didn't cause the pollution that arrived on our beaches, we couldn't have foreseen it, I certainly never thought I would ever be reporting to council that we were literally having to vacuum the beaches!

But when the call came, everyone rose to the occasion. Not all heroes wear capes, but they mostly seem to live and work in West Norfolk.

Wash East Coast Management Strategy (WECMS) Stakeholder Forum

We held another WECMS Stakeholder meeting at the Valentine Road offices in Hunstanton in May.

There were updates on our coastline, including the cliffs. The EA advised of the process for the update of the Management Strategy and how that has been slightly delayed due to beach pollution. Although work has started and more updates will be given at the next meeting.

Anyone interested in the update and shoreline management going forward is welcome to come along to the next meeting. Cookies or cakes are usually available!

All Party Flood Prevention Summit

On 2nd June I attended an event at Parliament organised by George Freeman MP in relation to his upcoming Inland Flooding Prevention Bill.

The event was organised to give a wide range of stakeholders, the ability to input into the bill, share ideas and to develop a manifesto to present to ministers.

Topics discussed included responsibilies; essentially who does what and who is accountable, which currently is really complex and not at all obvious. Liabilities; who should be held accountable when they fail to make adequate provision for flood provision and obviously funding.

Several MP's were present, plus representatives from several councils, IDB's, water companies, the Fire Service and other stakeholders. It was a lively intense session that everyone who attended had the opportunity to input ideas into.

Suggestions included changing how funding is distributed, moving funding and decision making from the EA to a more locally based organisation, changing housing targets to take into account areas at high risk of flooding, taking a more holistic catchment based approach, not just looking at individual sites. Enforcing riparian maintenance, not relying on residents groups to undertake riparian maintenance for new developments, and my personal suggestion – changing how IDB's are funded to relieve the financial pressure from local authorities. My point being further supported by the representative from Boston.

Further meetings are planned, I will update development and progress of the bill when we have more information.

Surveillance of Shellfish Waters

Our Environmental Health teams have been increasing the amount of shellfish testing they are undertaking, although this is usual in the summer months.

Local authorities are responsible for ensuring the safety of shellfish harvested in their areas by conducting regular sampling of both the shellfish and surrounding waters. This monitoring focuses on microbiological contamination, such as E. coli, and the presence of marine biotoxins.

During the warmer months, the food safety team increases sampling efforts to enhance surveillance of marine biotoxins. This may include resampling when initial results indicate elevated levels, as these toxins can accumulate in shellfish and pose serious health risks to humans. Marine biotoxins are produced by certain naturally occurring algae. Shellfish become contaminated by feeding on these algae, and since the toxins are not destroyed by normal cooking processes, they must be closely monitored.

If toxin levels exceed permitted thresholds, local authorities are required to close affected shellfish harvesting areas until levels return to safe limits.

Although such closures are rare in this region, the presence of marine biotoxins in local waters makes ongoing surveillance essential. This vigilance helps maintain public health and supports confidence in the shellfish industry both locally and internationally.

Promoting Water Safety: Empowering Schools for Drowning Prevention Week

193 people lost their lives to accidental drowning in the UK in 2024. 61% of those occurred in inland waterways including rivers, lakes, canals and reservoirs. 84% of those who lost their lives were male. 37% occurred in people who never expected to enter the water.

We're proud to continue championing water safety by equipping schools with learning resources during Drowning Prevention Week (June 14th to 21st).

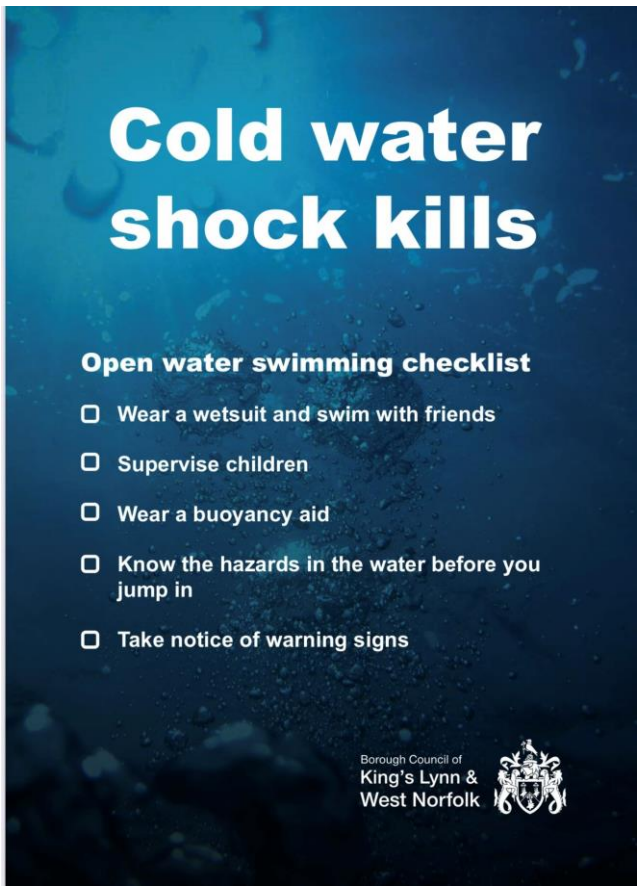
As part of our campaign, we've distributed multilingual posters—available in English, Portuguese, Russian, and Lithuanian—highlighting the dangers of cold water shock and essential tips for staying safe around water.

To further support schools, we've referenced the Royal Life Saving Society's comprehensive school packs and spotlighted Alive's free swimming sessions, helping children build confidence and life-saving skills in the water.

The water becomes more attractive in warmer weather, which is when most accidental drownings occure. Often the water can be colder than it appears.

Please follow water safety advice; never swim alone, take notice of warning signs, ensure you know what to do if you enter the water unexpectedly. Don't panic or thrash about, focus on floating to control your breathing.

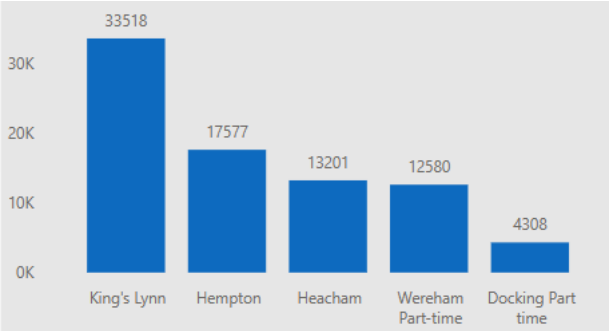
For more information on Drowning Prevention Week: Royal Life Saving Society UK's Drowning Prevention Week



Recycling Centre Booking System

Since the booking system was introduced in Nov 2024, as at the end of May, 450,000 bookings had been made to visit Norfolk recycling centres. 82,661 of those were in West Norfolk, representing some 19% of total bookings.

Some 13,500 visits have involved bringing DIY waste. The booking system has allowed this to be monitored more closely to ensure fair use of the system.

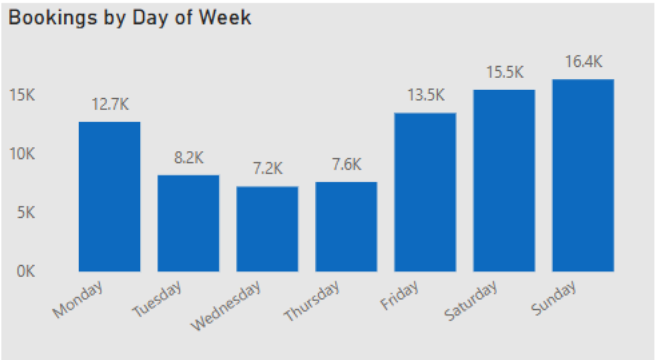


While we continue to monitor the situation, it appears that the introduction of the booking system has had no effect on fly tipping rates.

Visits to recycling centres run smoothly, incidents of abuse to staff are reducing. While anecdotally numbers of visits to the recycling centres has reduced, it also appears that people are saving up more waste to take it all in one trip rather than making multiple trips for small numbers of items.

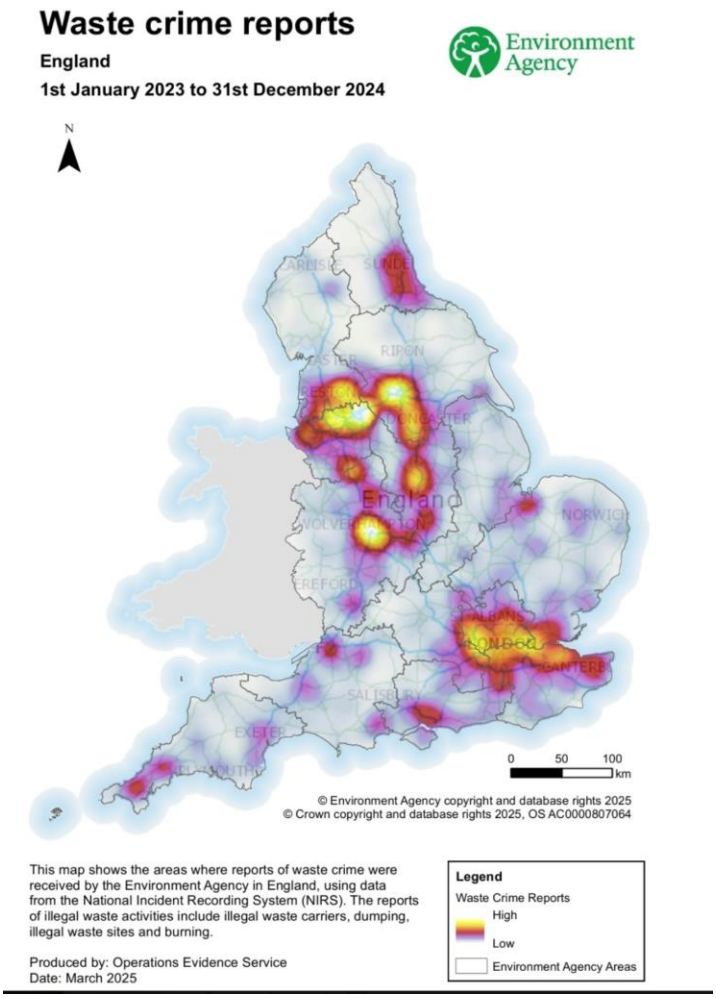
No Waste Wednesdays

From June 2025, all recycling centres will be closed on a Wednesday, in line with Wednesday being the quietest day of the week.



Waste Crime Heatmap & Fly Tipping

You may have seen that the EA have published a heatmap for waste crime including fly tipping.



The map essentially puts a hot spot in the area around Terrington St Clements. We are struggling to understand why we are showing as a hotter area than the rest of Norfolk.

Although, the waste crime doesn't just take into account fly tipping cases. It may be that other well known crimes currently being investigated and prosecuted by the EA have an effect on the figures. We have no details on what information was used to develop the map.

As when we look at the fly tipping cases reported across the county by district, the number of cases reported in West Norfolk isn't obviously higher than elsewhere and doesn't apparently justify any hotspot. Great Yarmouth recently changed how cases were reported which explains the anomaly in their 24-25 figures.

Local Authority	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24	24-25
Breckland Council	1009	984	1103	975	760	915	830
Broadland District Council	515	438	629	508	887	785	914
Great Yarmouth Borough Council	1555	1491	2146	1869	1171	1153	7720
Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council	1460	1261	1188	1326	1676	1838	1831
North Norfolk District Council	569	517	473	397	504	353	385
Norwich City Council	5290	4937	4755	4805	5297	5392	5638
South Norfolk Council	888	725	971	881	763	729	567
Countywide total	**11286**	**10353**	**11265**	**10761**	**11058**	**11165**	**17885**
Total exc. Yarmouth	9731	8862	9119	8892	9887	10012	10165

Fly tipping cases are much too high. Although from the number of cases reported it seems the public are confident that we will not only clear dumped waste, but will investigate and fine or prosecute where we can. Having a dedicated team to investigate fly tipping has led to an increase in reports, not necessarily an increase in cases. We're just hearing about them more, which can only be a good thing.

Our residents are our eyes and ears. Please do continue to report fly tipping cases and if you have any evidence which would be useful in our investigations, please get in touch with the waste team.

Fly Tippers are not welcome in West Norfolk and we will do all that we can to find those responsible.

Food and Safety Newsletters

We have a new webpage that has just gone live where our food and safety newsletters are now available for anyone to access online. A new newsletter will go out in July.

The information and advice would be relevant to anyone involved in food preparation, including in the home so is worth a look.

The QR code links to the page

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

Water Summit – 19th June 2025

What's in the water?

"Top of the plops"
"Another brown flag award"
"Go in at your peril"

We've all seen the headlines but do they really give an accurate picture of water quality locally. Well the answer is yes, and also no.

The North Sea is shallow and silty, suspended silt giving a brown appearance. Algal blooms and wave agitation are a common source of sea foam. So often what you see, isn't what you think it is.

There has been a lot of focus on bathing water quality and this can only be a good thing. But often focus is on the headlines which can give a misleading picture.

So lets start with the testing regime itself and what the picture is nationally. Designated bathing waters are tested for Intestinal Enterococci (IE) and Escherichia coli (E Coli – EC). These bacteria can indicate the presence of faecal matter in the water, sources of both bacteria can include wildlife, sewage, agricultural livestock, domestic animals, birds and road drainage.

Each test represents only a moment in time. Testing results can vary day to day, or even at different times on the same day.

The results of each test are published by the Environment Agency and are updated online a few days after each test. Bathing waters are tested on 20 occasions each year between May and September.

The results for each year are combined with the results of the previous three years, to provide a classification for that bathing water site for the following year.

So even if a bathing site shows good results for one year, if the previous three years weren't good, the classification will reflect this. Equally, if the results show improvements, that won't necessarily be reflected in the classifications for a few years after the improvements occurred.

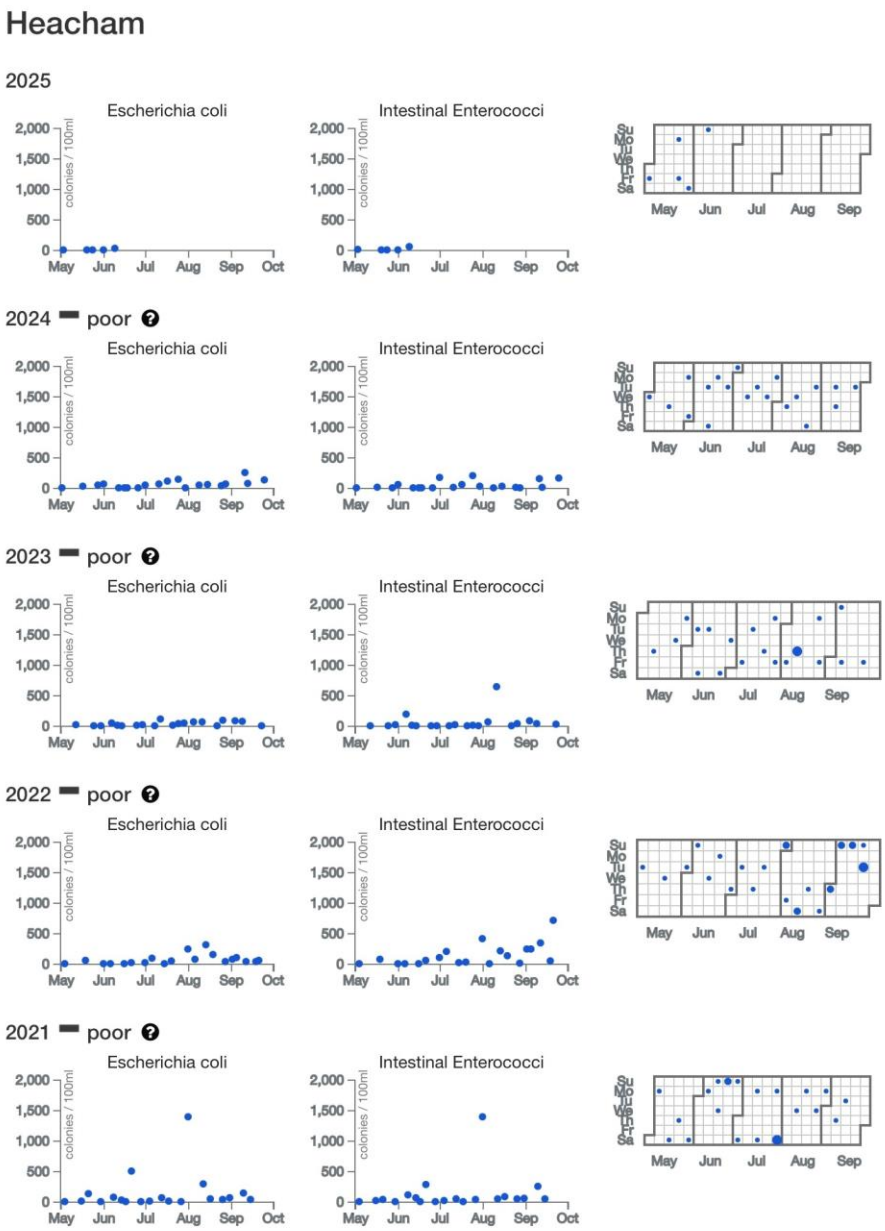
Bathing waters can be classified either Excellent, Good, Sufficient or Poor.
In 2021 94.7% of bathing waters tested were rated Excellent or Good, in 2022 that had dropped to 92.9%, in 2023 that dropped again to 89.8% and in 2024 it dropped even further to 85.3%.

2021 saw only 4 sites classified as having poor bathing water quality, in 2022 that rose to 12, 2023 saw it rise again to 18, in 2024 it rose again to 37.

It should be considered that in 2024 there was also a rise in the total number of bathing sites tested, however the 37 still represents 8.2% of the total number tested, whereas in 2021 poor results only accounted for 1% of sites tested.

Further details can be found at: 2024 Statistics on English coastal and inland bathing waters: A summary of compliance with the 2013 bathing water regulations - GOV.UK

Here are the results for Heacham from 2021 to 2024. The latest published test (at time of writing) being taken on 8th June 2025:



As you can see, generally there has been an improvement over the last two years, however because of the way the classifications are calculated, that wouldn't show in the current classification. Also what isn't shown is that the last two years results taken on their own would have resulted in a "Good" classification and that 85% of results were in the "Excellent" range.

It is also worth noting that it is the levels of Intestinal Enterococci cause our water quality issues in West Norfolk. Levels of E.Coli at Heacham for instance are within the 'Excellent' range, which is Blue Flag quality.

So what is going on?

It's all too easy to point the finger at water companies and lay the blame at their door. In many instances that may well be the case, but it really is just one contributing factor amongst many.

The pollution risk forecasting system itself is also confusing and often misunderstood, leaving both councils and the public frustrated by a lack of consistent and accurate information. It is just that, a forecast, to be used as a guide, not necessarily as a definite indicator that pollution is present. It highlights for instance that where heavy rainfall occurs, there may be more pollution washed in the sea. As heavy rain flushes everything down, which may not be sewage at all.

Anglian Water publishes details of storm overflow events, which can be found on their storm overflow map which can be found here: What we're doing to improve your local rivers & coastline. Where you can see the locations and times of any overflows.

The last storm overflow event in West Norfolk was actually today (16th June) at 1327 for 2 minutes. There were also overflows over the weekend in North Norfolk. I can't say that storm overflows are acceptable, as they aren't, but investments and improvements are being made. Like it or not, storm overflows are only one issue in what is a complex picture with many factors involved.

Even in cases where DNA testing is undertaken to ascertain the source of the pollution, no simple solution is identified. Over here in the Wash, with our internationally important designations and bird populations, we weren't surprised to see seabird DNA as a huge marker accounting for over 60% of the DNA found, but human, dog and ruminant DNA were also found. In the case of North Norfolk, even chicken DNA was identified in the sea water.

While we could say that decades of underinvestment in our sewage and ground water system has left us with systems that can't cope and our rivers and seas are being used as dumping grounds, unless North Norfolk has a breed of lesser spotted sea-chicken, or toilet trained chickens, that DNA found its way onto the beach another way.

Run off, misconnections and surface water drains all play a part, but even that is only part of the picture. We know that microplastics, transport run off, agriculture, coastal landfills and industrial pollution are all playing a part all around the country, it's just hard to ascertain to what extent and where.

Which is why improvements require a co-ordinated and collaborative approach.

This council has worked closely with Anglian Water and the Environment Agency to try to ascertain what the issues are locally and to try to bring about improvements. I am extremely grateful for their collaborative approach and everything they've contributed so far. This work was started by Cllr's Dark and Parish and continues today. Improvements as you can see have been made. There has been much work and analysis going on behind the scenes, which often goes unreported.

Clear evidence was found for an association between the presence of dog DNA and high indicator bacterial concentrations, however the evidence also suggests that if dogs were removed, while there would be improvements in water quality, it would not affect the overall classifications.

Clear evidence was found for an association between higher concentrations of both human-specific DNA and human-specific bacterial DNA with high indicator bacterial concentrations.

There are actually very limited storm overflows in this area, there is also a UV plant at Heacham, the result suggests misconnections or other third party foul arrangements, for example septic tanks could be an issue. Misconnection surveys have been carried out and none have currently been identified.

There is also clear evidence of an association between higher concentrations of ruminant-specific bacterial DNA and high indicator bacterial concentrations. However there has been limited grazing in recent years so this may suggest markers may be from further upstream.

Then we come back to the clear evidence of an association between higher concentrations of seabird bacterial DNA and high intestinal enterococci concentrations. There is no getting away from the fact that we have a lot of seabirds.

In terms of the DNA testing itself, it's also worth noting that the testing analysis picks up both live and dead bacteria, so while the bacteria may be present, it may also be dead.

So as you can see, focussing on one single potential issue, doesn't give us a complete picture.

The LGA Coastal SIG (Special Interest Group) surveyed its members to evaluate the water quality issues facing coastal councils and communities. The results paint a stark picture of many councils becoming increasingly concerned about water quality in their area. Coastal communities rely on tourism together with our local fishing and shellfish industries. If we want to have healthy, successful, sustainable coastal communities for the future, we need to start addressing these issues and tackling them at source. However, we also need to start looking at the evidence not clickbait headlines.

A testing regime that only covers the summer months also isn't providing a complete picture of what is going on in our waters, it's just a small snapshot in time. More water quality testing, with year round monitoring and a new reporting system that everyone understands would help.

Currently we know that bacteria levels are highest in July and August. Is that because of the increased tourism levels? Higher Temperatures? Less rainfall? More rainfall? Bird breeding season? We don't know. Why are more bathing sites being rated as poor? Again, we don't know.

Year round testing would give us a much better idea. More catchment testing would also pick up where this pollution is coming from. Just testing the bathing water at the beach doesn't give us enough information to be able to tackle issues.

As your Cabinet Member, the Member Champion for coastal water quality for the LGA Coastal SIG and chair of their Water Quality Working Group, I work with other councils, the Environment Agency and other agencies including OFWAT to highlight issues around water quality.

By working together we can share information and ideas, our voices are magnified and we can target our work to where we feel we can have the biggest impact.

This was the idea behind the Water Summit, which was originally planned to be an in person event here in West Norfolk, however due to several factors, is now to be held online on 19th June.

With speakers from Defra, the Environment Agency, OFWAT, Anglian Water, Durham University, Surfers Against Sewage, The Marine Conservation Society and others, including Alison Hume MP, with the LGA Coastal SIG we are bringing together many organisations and councils. The day isn't to focus on what has gone on in the past, or to point fingers and blame, but to look to the future - How can we all work together to improve our water quality.

Changes and improvements are coming, the Government has pledged to improve water quality and has set up the Independent Water Commission, which we'll be hearing more about at the summit, but lets be clear - every single person can make a difference.

Even very small actions can help, from not leaving litter to picking up after your dog, not just on the beach – everywhere. As it all washes up on the beach eventually and will be reflected in those test results we spend so much time analysing the results.

3 Meetings Attended and Meetings Scheduled

Various Portfolio Briefings
Cabinet Sifting
Cabinet Briefing
Cabinet
Norfolk Coast Protected Landscape Strategy Meeting
Norfolk Coast Protected Landscape CMG Meeting
Various LGA Coastal SIG meetings re Water Summit
RFCC Training on funding
WECMS Stakeholder meeting
NEWS Board meeting
All Party Flood Summit
Coastal Nature Recovery Meeting
Meeting with the EA re coastal funding
Beach clean up thank you reception
Water Summit