

Meeting of:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	Thursday, 04 December 2025
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Place Scrutiny Committee
Report Title:	Vale of Glamorgan and Natural Resource Wales – Bathing Water Quality Project Partnership Agreement
Purpose of Report:	To seek approval to sign the Partnership Agreement between Vale of Glamorgan Council and Natural Resources Wales
Report Owner:	Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services
Responsible Officer:	Chief Executive
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Director of Place Operational Manager - Accountancy Head of Shared Resource Services (SRS) Committee Reports
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet
Executive Summary: - The Vale of Glamorgan has eight designated bathing beaches, the highest concentration in Southeast Wales. Bathing water quality is vital for public health, environmental protection, and the local economy, especially tourism around Barry Island and other coastal resorts and destinations. - A partnership between the Council and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) aims to improve public access to real-time bathing water quality information. The project focuses on Jackson's Bay and Whitmore Bay, with statistical models developed using environmental and meteorological data. Phase two will automate water quality predictions and display them via bilingual electronic signage and online platforms. - Welsh Government funding has been secured via NRW, with an additional £50,000 from the Brilliant Basics fund for display infrastructure. Cabinet approval is sought to delegate authority for signing the formal partnership agreement to enable project completion. - The agreement does not commit the Council to additional expenditure and has no employment implications.	

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet notes the ongoing work between the Council and Natural Resources Wales and the current bathing water classifications for 2025, at the 8 designated bathing water beaches.
2. That Cabinet approves the proposed Partnership Agreement between the Council and Natural Resources Wales, that will improve public access to real-time bathing water quality information at Jacksons Bay and Whitmore Bay beaches.
3. That delegated authority is granted to the Head of Neighbourhood Services in consultation with Head of Finance/Section 151 Officer and the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Building Services to sign the Partnership Agreement between Vale of Glamorgan Council and Natural Resources Wales.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To update Cabinet on the ongoing partnership work between the Council and Natural Resources Wales and the outcome of this year's bathing water sampling.
2. So the Council can progress with the project that will provide timely water quality advice to the public.
3. So the partnership agreement can be signed and to secure funding via Welsh Government to take forward the final phase of the project work.

1. Background

- 1.1 Bathing water quality is a crucial aspect of public health and environmental protection. The Vale of Glamorgan prides itself on having 8 designated bathing water beaches: - Penarth Beach, Jackson's Bay, Whitmore Bay, Watch House Bay (Barry), The Knap, Col-Huw (Llantwit Major), Dunraven Bay (Southerndown) and Ogmores-by-Sea, and these play a key role in supporting the local economy, in particular the thriving tourism industry around Barry, in addition to the well-being of local residents who frequent the waters
- 1.2 The Bathing Water Regulations 2013 introduced a classification system with stringent water quality standards and put an emphasis on providing information to the public. Welsh Government must inform members of the public about bathing water management, bathing water quality, and potential threats to bathing water quality and public health. Waters are classified based on samples taken from the previous four years to even out effects of extreme situations.
- 1.3 Designated bathing waters are classified as excellent, good, sufficient or poor depending on water quality sampling results. The bathing water quality classifications are based on two microbiological parameters: intestinal enterococci and E.coli.
- 1.4 NRW is the principal environmental agency in Wales tasked with overseeing various aspects of natural resource management, including water quality. Its

roles and responsibilities regarding the bathing water regulations comprise of the following:

- Conducting regular monitoring and assessment of bathing water quality at designated sites.
- Providing data and analysis to inform decision-making processes related to bathing water management.
- Implementing measures to mitigate pollution sources and improve water quality where necessary.
- Collaborating with Local Authorities, Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water, and other stakeholders to achieve shared objectives in maintaining bathing water standards.

1.5 NRW is responsible for monitoring and reporting against the standards in the Regulations. Samples are analysed for two types of bacteria, which indicate pollution from sewage or livestock. Polluted water can have impacts on human health, including causing stomach upsets and diarrhoea if swallowed.

1.6 Local Authorities in Wales are responsible for managing and regulating bathing waters within their jurisdictions. Their roles include:

- Designating and managing bathing water sites in accordance with regulatory requirements.
- Implementing pollution prevention measures and addressing sources of contamination within their areas of control.
- Collaborating with NRW, Welsh Government, and other stakeholders to develop local strategies for improving bathing water quality.
- Providing information and guidance to the public regarding safe bathing practices and water quality standards.

1.7 As the primary provider of water and wastewater services in Wales, Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW) plays a crucial role in ensuring compliance with bathing water regulations. Its responsibilities include:

- Operating and maintaining wastewater treatment facilities to minimize discharges and pollutants entering bathing waters.
- Implementing infrastructure upgrades and pollution control measures to enhance water quality.
- Collaborating with regulatory authorities and stakeholders to monitor and address issues affecting bathing water quality.
- Engaging in public outreach and education initiatives to promote awareness of water conservation and pollution prevention measures.

1.8 The revised bathing water regulations in Wales signified a concerted effort by government agencies, environmental organisations, and Local Authorities to uphold stringent standards of water quality and protect public health. Through collaborative efforts and sustained investments in monitoring, enforcement, and

pollution control measures, Wales aims to ensure that its bathing waters remain safe, clean, and enjoyable for residents and visitors alike.

- 1.9** During the most recent 2025 bathing water season (15th May – 30th September), the designated beaches in the Vale of Glamorgan had the following water classifications:

Excellent

- Dunraven Bay
- The Knap
- Col-Huw Beach (Llantwit Major)

Good

- Penarth Beach
- Jackson's Bay
- Whitmore Bay

Poor

- Watch House Bay
- Ogmere by Sea

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** In 2023 a partnership project between NRW and the Council commenced to develop a real-time water quality prediction tool to help provide water quality information to bathers at two of the designated beaches in Barry, namely Jackson's Bay and Whitmore Bay. The project was split into two phases, with the first phase requiring the collection of robust environmental data to support the development of statistical models.
- 2.2** To develop these models over the course of the 2023 bathing season, a detailed water sampling program was completed on Jacksons and Whitmore beaches, and these results were utilised along with meteorological data, such as rainfall, UV radiance and river level data etc to develop statistical models to better understand key parameters which influence / affect the water quality at the beaches.
- 2.3** During the course of 2024/25 work continued with NRW and their external consultants to use the collected datasets to develop and finalise the statistical model which will be used to develop the final prediction forecasting tool.
- 2.4** The project is now due to progress into to the second and final phase with a key objective to develop the statistical assessment models into fully automated water quality prediction system. This will eventually enable information display boards to be installed on the beaches so that bathers will be made aware of the predicted water quality at the beaches over the course of a day during the bathing season. It is envisaged that this work will be completed during the 2026 bathing water season.

- 2.5** The automation system will use the agreed models for Jackson's Bay and Whitmore Bay and associated environmental data inputs to provide a pollution risk forecast during the bathing season (15th May-30th Sept). The system will be linked to electronic variable messaging displays installed at the seafronts adjoining the respective designated Bathing Waters and published online to notify the public bilingually (in English and Cymraeg) of the most recent pollution risk forecast water quality status at each location. The system will allow automatic updates of the bilingual message display at the specified beaches and at agreed locations online, several times a day between 08:00-20:00 (BST).
- 2.6** Introducing pollution risk forecasting in Barry will inform beach management decisions and provide timely water quality advice to the public to enable them to make an informed decision whether to swim
- 2.7** The project has been funded by Welsh Government, and to enable the Council to progress procurement of the automation system NRW have requested that a formal partnership agreement is now signed between the main project partners. This will enable NRW to transfer allocated Welsh Government funding for this project to the Vale of Glamorgan.
- 2.8** In addition, the Vale of Glamorgan has secured further funding from Welsh Government's Brilliant Basics funding of £50,000 to procure and install the necessary variable display screens at Jacksons and Whitmore. This was secured as part of a wider bid to Improve Visitor Experiences at Barry Island which secured funding for wider improvements including changing rooms and beach accessible wheelchairs.
- 2.9** This report is therefore seeking Cabinet approval to provide delegated authority to the Head of Neighbourhood Services, to sign the partnership agreement with NRW to enable this project to continue and enable completion of the project aims.
- 2.10** Introducing pollution risk forecasting in Barry will inform beach management decisions and provide timely water quality advice to the public to enable them to make an informed decision whether to swim.
- 2.11** It will also offer resilience to the overall bathing water classifications through discounting of a sample in certain conditions when a warning of predicted poor water quality is given to people, under strict guidelines set in the legislation.
- 2.12** However, Members should note that this project has been funded by the Welsh Government via NRW Funds and has been in development for a number of years, and therefore this is not something that can be easily replicated for other beaches in the Vale of Glamorgan both in terms of time but also capital investment.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** The Well-being of Future Generations Act requires the Council to underpin decision making by contributing to the seven well-being goals of the Act,

following the five ways of working, and consequently undertaking actions that will have a positive impact on people living in the future as well as those living today. Consequently, SRS seeks to work in the following ways:

- Looking to the long term;
- Taking an integrated approach;
- Involving a diversity of the population in the decisions affecting them;
- Working with others in a collaborative way to find shared sustainable solutions;
- Acting to prevent problems from occurring or getting worse.

3.2 In discharging its duties under the 2015 Act, the Council has set and published Well-being objectives designed to maximise its contribution to achieving the national Well-being goals. The Well-being objectives are set out in Vale Council's Well-being Objectives and Improvement Plan:

<https://www.valepsb.wales/en/Our-Plan.aspx>

3.3 When exercising its functions, the Council is required to take all reasonable steps to meet its Well-being objectives. This means that the decision makers should consider how the proposed decision will contribute towards meeting the Well-being objectives and must be satisfied that all reasonable steps have been taken to meet those objectives.

3.4 The Well-being duty also requires the Council to act in accordance with a 'sustainable development principle.' This principle requires the Council to act in a way which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Put simply, this means that Council decision makers must take account of the impact of their decisions on people living their lives in Wales in the future. In doing so, the Council must:

Look to the long term;

- Focus on prevention by understanding the root causes of problems;
- Deliver an integrated approach to achieving the seven national well-being goals;
- Work in collaboration with others to find shared sustainable solutions; and
- Involve people from all sections of the community in the decisions which affect them.

3.5 Within the Vale 2030 Plan the Council has committed to Respecting and Protecting the Environment under Objective 2. The Vale 2030 plan details the Council will lead on efforts to ensure people enjoy clean bathing waters.

3.6 It is clear that the by working in partnership with NRW the Council is taking a collaborative approach to addressing the Bathing Water Quality issues that have been identified.

- 3.7** The ambition to improve and enhance the bathing water quality at the beaches within the Vale of Glamorgan will ensure that pollution issues are addressed to ensure that future generations can enjoy and have access to the highest standards of bathing waters.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1** Bathing water quality reporting is highly perceptible to climatic changes, in particular, increased periods of heavy rainfall and with our changing climate, we must be prepared to deal with impacts of longer, heavier bouts of rain on a regular basis. Climate change has the potential to impact coastal ecosystems in multiple ways, altering human exposure to water-related contaminants that can cause illness.
- 4.2** The commitment to work with NRW as set out in this report will be vital to ensure that long term improvements and reduction in pollution can be implemented in order to ensure the protection and enhancement of bathing waters in the Vale of Glamorgan.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1** NRW has secured funding from Welsh Government for this project. The Council has secured separate funding from Welsh Government's Brilliant Basics funding which will further support the project in terms of providing funding for the display screens to be installed on the beaches.
- 5.2** As outlined above the partnership agreement is not committing to the Council to any additional expenditure. The partnership agreement merely facilitates the Council to procure the necessary external consultancy to develop the automation system which will facilitate the display of the forecasted water quality forecast.

Employment

- 5.3** There are no employment implications.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 5.4** With regards to annual reporting requirements under the LAQM regime, Welsh Government issues Statutory Guidance to Local Authorities under Section 88 of the Environment Act 1995. The guidance requires Local Authorities to regularly review and assess air quality in their area and to adopt the five ways of working as set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, including a focus on Sustainable Development. The Statutory Guidance with which Local Authorities must have regard when carrying out their air quality functions under the Environment Act 1995, sets out that Authorities in Wales have to produce an

Annual Progress Report in draft form by 30th September each year and publish it by 31st December at the latest.

- 5.5** This must include monitoring results for the previous calendar year, a progress report on action plan implementation and an update on any new policies or developments likely to affect local air quality.
- 5.6** Section 82 of the Environment Act 1995 places a duty on all Local Authorities to review periodically air quality in their area. This includes assessment of compliance of present and likely future air quality to comply with the objectives of the Air Quality (Wales) Regulations 2010.
- 5.7** Where air quality is unlikely to meet the objectives Section 83 of the Environment Act 1995 requires that the Council declares an Air Quality Management Area.
- 5.8** Section 83B of the Environment Act 1995 places a duty on the Council to develop an Action Plan to address the situation.
- 5.9** The Authority has a statutory duty to produce and publish reports fulfilling the requirements of the Local Air Quality Management process as set out in Part IV of the Environment Act (1995), the Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland 2007 and relevant Policy.
- 5.10** There are no equal opportunities implications from the publication of the report. Invitations to comment will be sent to all known stakeholders and interest groups to provide an opportunity for comments.

6. Background Papers

None.