KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

KENT FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Kent Flood Risk Management Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Monday, 22 July 2013.

PRESENT: Mr A H T Bowles, Dr M R Eddy, Mr M J Harrison, Mr B E MacDowall, Mr L B Ridings, MBE, Mrs P A V Stockell and Mr M J Vye

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Tant (Flood Risk Manager), Mr T Harwood (Senior Emergency Planning Officer), Ms C McKenzie (Sustainability and Climate Change Manager), Ms C Wissink (Coastal Communities Project Officer) and Mr A Tait (Democratic Services Officer)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs J Blanford (Ashford BC), Mr P Vickery-Jones (Canterbury CC), Mr J Muckle (Dartford BC), Mr J Scholey (Sevenoaks DC), Mr H Rogers (Tonbridge and Malling BC), Mr D Elliott Tunbridge Wells BC), Mr A Hills (Shepway DC) and Mr M Tapp (River Stour IDB)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Terms of Reference and Membership
(Item 1)

(1) The Democratic Services Officer reported that the non-voting membership of the Committee set out in paragraph 2.2 of the report should be amended to indicate that Mrs Marion Ring was the representative of Maidstone BC and that Mr Anthony Hills was the Shepway DC representative.

(2) The Committee noted its Terms of Reference and membership as set out in the report and as amended in (1) above.

2. Election of Chairman
(Item 3)

(1) Mr A H T Bowles moved, seconded by Mrs P A V Stockell that Mr M J Harrison be elected Chairman of the Committee.

Carried with no opposition

(2) Mr M J Harrison thereupon assumed the chair.

3. Minutes of the meeting on 19 November 2012
(Item 5)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2012 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

4. Local Flood Risk Management and the Local Strategy
(Item 6)

(1) Mr Tant gave a presentation to accompany his report. The slides are contained in the on-line agenda papers.

(2) Mr Tant went on to identify the other bodies involved in flooding within the County of Kent. These included the Emergency Services, the Parish and District Councils, neighbouring Authorities, the four Internal Drainage Boards (Lower Medway, Upper Medway, River Stour, Romney Marsh), two sewerage undertakers (Thames Water and Southern Water), the water companies, and the Environment Agency. Mr Tant also identified three standing committees with a flood risk management role (the LGA Inland Flood Risk Management Group, The LGA Coastal Special Interest Group, and the EFRA Committee).

(3) The County Council's role as the Lead Local Flood Authority was to provide a Local Strategy to manage local flood risk (flooding from surface water, groundwater and ordinary watercourses); to investigate flooding; to regulate ordinary watercourses (i.e. not main rivers); to maintain a register of structures and features; and to promote sustainable drainage systems (SuDs).

(4) Mr Tant said that KCC would assume responsibility for the approval and adoption of SuDS once the necessary parliamentary order had been confirmed. DEFRA was currently considering how and when this should happen, as there were a number of complex issues that still needed to be resolved before this could be done. DEFRA's target date was April 2014, but it was by no means certain that this would be achieved.

(5) Mr Vickery-Jones asked what weight the Lead Local Flood Authority carried with the various planning authorities and whether a local planning authority could designate "reserved areas" which would carry weight with a Planning Inspector when a developer appealed against a planning decision. Mr Tant replied that the Lead Local Flood Authority was not a statutory consultee. This meant that Planning Authorities did not have to take account of their advice. He also considered that it might be feasible to designate areas as unsuitable for housing within a Local Plan on flood risk grounds, so long as sufficient evidence could be provided.

(6) Mr Tant identified the areas of greatest flood risk from coastal and fluvial flooding in the County as the Low Weald, Thames Estuary and Romney Marsh. He also explained that some 76,000 homes in Kent were potentially at risk from surface water flooding, which compared to the figure of 54,000 in the second-most at risk county of Essex.

(7) KCC had carried out Surface Water Management Plans. These were studies of local flooding flood risk within the County. They could be high-level evidence gathering studies or in-depth studies which included modelling of the local flood risk infrastructure. Work on these studies was currently being carried out in Margate, Whitstable and Folkestone.

(8) Mr Tant next turned to the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy. The County Council was required to develop, maintain, apply and monitor a strategy for local flood risk management. Its objectives were to improve the understanding of the risks from local flooding; to reduce the impact of flooding; to ensure that development took account of flood risk; to provide clear information and guidance on the role of

risk management authorities; and to ensure that emergency plans and responses to flood incidents were effective.

(9) In response to questions from the Chairman, Mr Tant said that although the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy was required by Law to detail a number of functions and actions, not all of them were relevant in each of the Local Flood Risk areas. Kent's Local Strategy would be reviewed in May 2014, one year after its adoption.

(10) Mr Rogers asked why the map in the Local Strategy identified Paddock Wood as being at risk from flooding but did not do the same for Yalding and East Peckham. Mr Tant replied that this was because the Paddock Wood suffered from persistent local flooding whilst the risk to Yalding and East Peckham came from the main river. The Local Strategy dealt with local flooding, whilst other plans prepared by the Environment Agency covered fluvial and coastal flooding.

(11) Mr Vickery-Jones noted that 90% of Kent's water supply came from aquifers rather than reservoirs and asked whether there was a correlation between those areas at risk of flooding and aquifers. Mr Tant replied that the cause tended to vary from area to area. Groundwater flooding usually occurred after prolonged wet weather, whereas surface water flooding was usually caused by short, intense rainfall.

(12) RESOLVED that the report be noted following full consideration of its contents.

5. Coastal Communities 2150 - Presentation by Carolyn McKenzie, KCC Sustainability and Climate Change Manager
(Item 8)

(1) Ms Carolyn McKenzie (KCC Sustainability and Climate Change Manager) gave a presentation on Coastal Communities 2150 (CC2150). The slides from this presentation are contained in the on-line agenda papers.

(2) Ms McKenzie said that the purpose of CC2150 was to help communities to develop their own local visions and action plans to decrease their vulnerability and increase resilience to climate and coastal change. She said that some impacts of climate and coastal change were already being felt through severe events such as flooding, severe heat or cold. Preparation for these events was not at the level that it needed to be.

(3) Ms McKenzie said that between the years 1961 and 2006, average temperatures had risen by 1 degree over all four seasons. These years had been characterised by heavy winds and downpours as well as a decrease in summer rainfall.

(4) Ms McKenzie explained that CC2150 was a partnership. It was led by the Environment Agency and involved Kent CC, Hampshire CC, Alterra (a research institute for the green living environment in the Netherlands), Province West-Vlaanderen (Belgium) and the Agency for Maritime and Coastal Services.

(5) Ms McKenzie then set out the risks and opportunities from climate and coastal change. The risks were loss of biodiversity, risk to built infrastructure, risk to flood

security, increased frequency of flooding, health complications, increased rates of coastal erosion, shrinking of beaches and loss of landscape value. The opportunities provided were increased tourism, increased regeneration potential, agriculture and biodiversity diversification, renewable energy resources, skills development, economic development, and community building.

(6) Ms McKenzie went on to refer to the Severe Weather Impact Monitoring System that had been developed in Kent. This had revealed that on two weeks' rainfall had fallen during a two hour period on 20 July 2012. Another example of the impact of severe weather had been provided by the London Institute of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine which had revealed that 700 deaths had occurred due to heatwaves in 2013.

(7) CC2150's priority communities in Kent were Romney Marsh, Margate and Cliftonville, and the Isle of Sheppey. The method of delivery was to build knowledge, widen partnership working, develop visions, develop plans, and launch the project within the community. Each of these activities would lead naturally to the next, and the community launch would be the spur to further knowledge building as well as the final act of a project. Examples of practical actions were the development of flood alert systems, water retention and conservation measures and insulation from heat and cold.

(8) Ms McKenzie said that the next steps would be to attend and host events, gather local feedback and to develop the Vision and Action Plans. This would continue the pattern of very good local engagement that had already taken place.

(9) Members of the Committee thanked Ms McKenzie for her presentation and also commented on the excellent awareness-raising work undertaken by Christine Wissink (KCC Coastal Communities Project Manager).

(10) In response to a question from Mr Vickery-Jones, Ms Mckenzie said that the health impacts of climate change were to dramatically worsen environment-related conditions such as asthma.

(11) Ms Wissink replied to a question from Mrs Blandford by saying that a large number of studies had taken place locally, nationally and globally on plants that were able to sustain themselves. This was all part of work being undertaken to identify crops that needed less intensive water usage.

(12) RESOLVED that the presentation on CC2150 be noted with thanks, including the work that is being undertaken on the impacts of coastal and climate change.

6. Overview of Flood Risk in Kent and current issues - Presentation by Tony Harwood, Senior Emergency Planning Officer
(Item 7)

(1) Mr Harwood (Senior Emergency Planning Manager) gave a presentation. The slides are contained in the on-line agenda papers. He said that 2013 marked the 60th anniversary of the February 1953 East Coast storm surge and the 736th of the Great Storm of February 1287 which diverted the mouth of the River Rother by 15 miles overnight and destroyed the towns of Old Winchelsea and Broomhill

(http://en.wilkipedia.org/wiki/Broomhill) as well as causing economic chaos along the English Channel coastline. It had cost 500 english and 50,000 dutch lives.

(2) Mr Harwood then said that a major multi-agency flood response exercise had taken place on 30 April 2013 based on the scenarios of the 1953 storm surge event. The exercise had been informed by a new study on the effectiveness of existing defences and single and multi-agency contingency plans, whilst also testing the effectiveness of communications, which had been a major flaw in the response in 1953.

(3) Mr Harwood went on to describe some of the features of the 1953 disaster. In that event, loss of life in Erith had mainly occurred through hypothermia rather than drowning – so alerting, evacuation and humanitarian welfare interventions were all being enhanced. There had been significant breaches in the coastal defences at Canvey Island in Essex.

(4) It was important to note that sea levels had risen over the past 60 years. This was not only due to climate change. A second cause was hydroistatic rebound following the end of the last glaciation with land levels rising in the north of the UK, whilst the south was sinking.

(5) Mr Harwood then referred to the Folkestone floods of August 1996 which had seen fire fighters having to use sledgehammers to break down walls to release pockets of floodwater. The flooding had resulted in numerous people being made homeless and, in some cases, destitute.

(6) The year 2000 had seen major flooding in the Medway and Stour Valleys, impacting hugely in Tonbridge, Maidstone and surrounding villages, requiring the setting up of numerous rest centres.

(7) Mr Harwood moved on to explain the need for very sophisticated planning to protect populations that were vulnerable to flooding. Essential work had been undertaken to develop local multi-agency flood plans, multi-agency rapid response catchment plans and reservoir inundation plans.

(8) Mr Harwood replied to a question from the Chairman by saying that the Pitt Review had made 92 recommendations. One of these had called for political oversight of flood planning.

(9) Members of the Committee commented that flood defence work would be strengthened if an annual report on the work of the Kent Flood Risk Management Committee were to be presented to the County Council. Minutes from other Committees regularly appeared as items on the County Council agenda papers and it would be appropriate if this Committee's minutes were added.

(10) Mrs Stockell said that the best way to ensure that the Committee's work was embedded in the County Council's mainstream was for regular reports to be considered by the Environment, Highways and Waste Cabinet Committee.

(11) Mr Tapp asked whether Mr Harwood was in a position to give an assurance that there would be a timely warning if an event such as that of 1996 were to occur. Mr Harwood replied that this was a critical issue addressed by the new rapid

response catchment emergency plans and through Severe Weather Advisory Group meetings. Such early warnings were vital in responding to sudden surface water emergencies.

(12) RESOLVED that the report and its implications be noted.

7. Environment Agency Flood Alerts and Warnings since the last meeting - oral report
(Item 9)

(1) Mr Harwood reported that there had been 63 flood alerts and warnings since the last meeting of the Committee in November 2012. These had all been fluvial warnings, bar one for groundwater. He added that the flooding on the Nailbourne near Canterbury had lasted from 22 January to 19 April 2013.

(2) Mr Vickery-Jones asked whether there was a general policy of not housing people in ground floor flats if they lived in flood plains. Mr Harwood replied that this was often but not always recommended by the Environment Agency in their statutory consultee role to District planners. If an area was susceptible to fluvial flooding, it was usually recommended that the ground floor should not contain habitable rooms. Coastal flooding, on the other hand tended to pose more of a risk to the actual structure of a building because of the energy of the event – so coastal defences were prioritised over structural adaptation of individual buildings.

(3) RESOLVED that the report and its implications be noted.

8. Future Committee Topics
(Item 10)

(1) Members of the Committee considered a report suggesting future topics for its consideration. It was recognised that a number of the items which appeared in the report would require an invitation for a speaker to come to the meeting. Additional topics suggested were:-

- the role of the Police, Fire and Social Services;
- the impact of farming;
- working with Medway on planning in the flood plains;
- the latest thinking of the Environment Agency and the funding available to it;
- highways, drainage and flooding as they relate to railways;
- coastal erosion and risk management as it relates to Dungeness Power Station.

(2) The Chairman's suggestion of a day to be set aside for site visits was agreed.

(3) RESOLVED that the topics set out in the report and in paragraph (1) above be agreed for future meetings together with the possibility of an additional day being set aside for site visits.

9. Date of next meeting - Monday, 18 November 2013
(Item 11)

The Committee noted that its next meeting would be held on Monday, 18 November 2013.