

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, 21 July 2014.

PRESENT: Mr M J Harrison (Chairman), Mr D Baker, Mr A H T Bowles, Dr M R Eddy, 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 Resilience Officer), Ms K Lewis (Drainage and Flood Manager) and Mr A Tait (Democratic Services Officer)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs J Blanford (Ashford BC), Mr P Vickery-Jones (Canterbury CC), Mr A Hills (Shepway DC), Mr G Lewin (Swale BC), Mr D Elliott (Tunbridge Wells BC), Ms G Brown (KALC), Mr M Tapp (River Stour IDB), Mr M Dobson (Upper Medway IDB) and Mr P Flaherty (Kent Fire and Rescue).

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

8. Membership and Introductions

(Item 1)

(1) The Committee welcomed the appointment of Cllr Mrs Geraldine Brown (KALC) and Mr Paul Flaherty (Kent Fire and Rescue).

(2) The Chairman briefly reported that Members of the Committee had visited the Leigh Barrier before the meeting. He said that the visit had been very worthwhile and that the Environment Agency would be arranging a series of Open Days in September when those Members who had not been able to take part in the visit would be able to do so.

(3) Following the meeting, the Open Day dates were notified to the Democratic Services Officer as follows:-

9. Minutes of the meeting on 11 March 2014

(Item 4)

RESOLVED that, subject to the amendment to paragraph 24 of Minute 3 to indicate that Mr Bird had said that no serious flood warning had been received in Yalding, as well as some other minor textual amendments, the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2014 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

10. Report Back from Scrutiny Committee

(Item 5)

(1) The Chairman reported his attendance at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 12 June 2014, where he had been accompanied by the Flood Risk Manager, Max

Tant, the Senior Resilience Officer, Tony Harwood and Andrew Tait from Democratic Services.

- (2) RESOLVED that the report be noted, together with the assurance that the Committee is carrying out its work to the Scrutiny Committee's satisfaction.

11. Report to Cabinet on the Christmas/New Year 2013/14 Storms and Floods
(Item 6)

(1) The Chairman introduced the report on the decision of the Cabinet meeting on 7 July 2014 in respect of how KCC, in collaboration with its partners, could be better prepared to manage storm and flooding events in the future. He stressed the 17 recommendations which had now been agreed by Cabinet and underlined the role of the Committee in considering progress against the targets set.

(2) Dr Eddy noted that some of the recommendations had been given a start date of April 2014. He asked for an update on their implementation.

(3) Mr Harwood said that a Cross-Directorate Steering Group (or Delivery Group) was in the process of being established. It would be chaired by Paul Crick, Director of Environment, Planning and Enforcement. Meanwhile, work had started on Recommendation 4 ("Implement a strategy to encourage greater flood awareness and individual/Community resilience") through road shows in different parts of the County.

(4) Mr Vye asked whether consideration had been given to the use of social media and whether Community Wardens could be utilised to give out the message in areas that were prone to flooding. He also offered to put forward a list of matters which could be scrutinised by the Committee.

(5) Mrs Brown said that the parish councils of Yalding, East Peckham and Collier Street had permanent direct access to the Environment Agency control rooms and that discussions had also recently taken place between these parishes and the EA on how best to provide a consistent form of flood warning in the locality. She considered that Community Wardens should not be diverted from their task of looking after vulnerable people and that the risk of using them to deliver flooding messages was that they would do so in a manner which was not consistent with an overall strategy. She then said that one of the difficulties with using social media to convey warnings was that it provided the mainstream media with the scope and temptation to portray the entire system as though it were a farce.

(6) Mr Flaherty said that one of the lessons learned during the winter events was that people had not searched for available information. It was considered that one reason for this was that they did not know how and where to look for it. Kent Fire and Rescue was therefore working on a training programme for Flood Wardens. He would be able to update the Committee and provide more details at a future meeting.

(7) RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the report to Cabinet and its 17 recommendations be noted; and

- (b) the progress against the targets set be considered at future meetings of the Committee.

12. Highway Drainage Infrastructure Repairs, Renewals and Improvements *(Item 7)*

(1) Ms Katie Lewis, Drainage Manager introduced the report, which had originally been intended to focus on the capacity of the highway drainage system. She explained that this report had been expanded to take account of the fact that capacity issues were not the only causes of flooding on the Kent highways. Other issues were the damaged and ageing infrastructure, including ingressive tree roots; damage by third parties, where utility services had laid their services through KCC's infrastructure; and the very large number of soakways that were now coming very close to the end of their twenty to thirty year life spans.

(2) The two main capacity issues were connections into the drainage system as a result of the development taking place across the county; and also the number of local residents who were paving over their driveways, leading to more surface water running onto the road instead of draining away through permeable land. The other issue arose when water had to be discharged into a third party sewer owned by Southern Water or Thames Water. She said that KCC had no power to require them to increase the capacity of their water drainage system. Consequently, the only alternative (and usually costly) option was to divert water elsewhere. The most cost effective option was to build up the capacity of the highway by, for example, raising kerbs or by erecting permanent flood warning signs.

(3) Ms Lewis said that land drainage had been a particular problem during the recent winter. Historically, KCC had tended to be over-lenient. A more robust approach was now being adopted. Although KCC would always seek to work with the landowners, it was now becoming increasingly necessary to use Highway Authority powers by taking enforcement action or by undertaking the work themselves and recharging.

(4) A one-off additional sum of £3m had been invested by KCC for work on drainage improvement schemes as well as 200 – 300 minor repairs, additional to the work that the County would normally undertake. Whilst this was good news, it should be born in mind that there had been some 3.5k drainage enquiries which would require investment.

(5) Mr Lewin referred to a very recent flash flooding event in Swale, Gravesham and Dartford. He suggested that the Kent Planning Officers Group could discuss the entire question of flooding arising out of short term causes in terms of design of residential and commercial development.

(6) Ms Lewis replied by saying that the Severe Weather Plan was in the process of being re-written to respond to flash flooding occurrences. It had been very fortunate on this occasion that senior officers had been available to assist. The follow up discussions were considering the causes in greater depth as well as how to improve liaison arrangements for a rapid response. This discussion would involve Southern Water, the EA and the Emergency Planning Team. In terms of planning development, much consideration was being given to sustainable drainage. KCC

would soon be in a position to require developers to have their drainage schemes approved. This would help to alleviate the current problems.

(7) Mr Harwood said that there was a widely held view (which had been particularly evident during the recent flash flooding event) that the creation of dropped kerbs enabled water to follow gravity and seep into people's houses. Although dropping kerbs might seem like a relatively minor change, more diligence would be needed to ensure that their design did not produce this result.

(8) The Chairman expressed concern that many flood warning signs were too small and flimsy to be effective and put the view forward that they should be resistant to the effects of heavy winds.

(9) Mr Vickery-Jones said that Ashford BC had undertaken a lot of work on retaining water on site, so that it did not discharge anywhere near the natural flow. This might be worthy of more general consideration. He added that there were occasions when what appeared to be a question of lack of capacity actually turned out to a matter requiring minor adjustments to the layout of pipes. This had been the case at the Street Roundabout in Herne Bay.

(10) Dr Eddy asked what financial arrangements were being made for the repair of those parts of the infrastructure for which KCC had responsibility. He then alluded to the work of the Select Committee which had looked into the 2000 floods. It had expressed strong concern that farmers were ploughing up and down a slope rather than across it, increasing run-off in terms of amount and quality of water.

(11) Ms Lewis replied that the process for improving drainage was that an inquiry from the public would be followed a check for defects and the cleansing of the system. If a defect was found, the site would be risk assessed. The outcome of the risk assessment would determine where the defect was placed in the priority list. The current budget for repairing drainage systems was £4.5m. The current state of the network meant that KCC had to be more reactive in its approach. KCC's approach to run off as a result of farming activities was to write with an explanation that they were causing water to drain onto the highway and that they needed to stop. Farmers were invariably happy to change their practice once its consequences had been drawn to their attention. The next step was to work with the NFU to publicise the problem to a greater extent and help keep the highway safe.

(12) Mr Vye said that he had recently attended a meeting of the Little Stour and Nailbourne River Management Group who had provided him with details where they considered that failures in highway drainage had contributed to the winter flooding events. He asked for reassurance that highways drainage was being considered by the numerous multi-agency technical groups. He also asked for the Committee to receive regular highways drainage updates so that it could be reassured that as much as possible was being done to ensure that this was not a contributory factor to flooding events in the future. Ms Lewis replied that she would be happy to provide such update report. She confirmed that representatives from her team attended many of the meetings and worked closely with the EA, IDBs and others.

(13) In response to a question from the Chairman, Mr Tant confirmed that KCC did have enforcement powers, outside of IDB Districts, to ensure that drainage systems were unblocked. It could not, however, carry out the work itself (as it would have been able to do if it were a Unitary Authority). In Hildenborough, these powers rested

with the Upper Medway IDB. KCC would only be able to use enforcement powers at the point where internal drainage problems were actually causing flooding.

(14) Mrs Brown said that Yalding PC had worked closely with Ms Lewis' Team. She asked whether it would be helpful if a representative of the Parish Councils in each area were to identify highways drainage problems and report them to the Team. Ms Lewis replied that this would be a beneficial initiative, particularly in respect of minor roads. She agreed with the Chairman that the most effective way to do this would be through liaison with the Highways Stewards.

(15) RESOLVED to note the need for the current level of investment in highway drainage infrastructure to be maintained and potentially increased in the future.

13. Environment Agency and Met Office Flood Alerts and Warnings and KCC flood response activities since the last meeting
(Item 8)

(1) Mr Harwood reported that the Committee papers had been published before the previous weekend's flooding events. As a result, the figure of 1 Flood Alert set out in Appendix 1 of the report had now become 4. The latest events had occurred in the Shuttle and Cray catchment area; the upper River Stour; and the Isle of Sheppey.

(2) There had also been further significant surface water flooding events in Swale (Sittingbourne, Upchurch and Teynham) and Gravesham. This had included storm damage to the Civic Centre, resulting in communication network failures which, in turn, had made it difficult for the Borough Council's officers to respond to a lightning strike on a residential property which had required an evacuation and homelessness response. There had also been a power outage failure in Canterbury affecting some 200 properties as a result of a lightning strike on an overhead power cable. Another power outage failure had occurred in New Romney affecting a number of residents.

(3) Mr Harwood then said that it was essential that any lessons to be learned were identified and acted upon promptly.

(4) Mr Harwood drew the Committee's attention to the graph in Appendix 2 which showed that the number of KCC resilience and emergency severe weather related incident alerts had been steadily low for much of the previous decade, but had risen sharply over the previous two years. This could be related to global weather patterns and work should be undertaken to see whether this was the case.

(5) Mr Hills said that the weather patterns were becoming ever more volatile as evidenced by the increased number and variety of severe weather warnings issued by the Met Office in his own area of New Romney.

(6) Mrs Brown stressed the need to examine the question of how people could remain in contact with one another when the communications network had been damaged by the weather.

(7) The Chairman suggested that one method of alternative communication that had been used in the past had been the air raid sirens. In Whitstable, these had been

removed even though they might have been able to provide some measure of flood warning.

(8) Mrs Stockell stressed the need for alternative communication methods to be explored. One possibility might be the use of the old analogue phones.

(9) RESOLVED that the level of alerts since the previous meeting of the Committee be noted (as updated at the meeting) together with the longer term trend.

14. Sustainable Drainage Oral Update *(Item 9)*

(1) Mr Tant said that there was provision in the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 for sustainable drainage to be delivered as a matter of course in all new development. The provision for KCC to become responsible for approving and possibly adopting SuDS schemes had not yet been commenced. Civil Servants had visited KCC as well as a number of other authorities and had underlined that the Government was committed to full implementation of the Act, including SuDS. The most likely course of events was that there would be an announcement towards the end of the current Parliament that commencement would take place early in the next Parliament.

(2) Mr Tant replied to a question from the Chairman by saying that the legislation would only apply to new development that took place after the date of commencement.

(3) RESOLVED that the report be noted.