

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, 16 November 2015.

PRESENT: Mr M J Harrison (Chairman), Mr A H T Bowles, Mr J A Davies (Substitute for Mrs P A V Stockell), Dr M R Eddy, Mr P J Homewood (Substitute for Mr L B Ridings, MBE), Mr A Terry, Mr M J Vye, Mrs J Blanford (Ashford BC), Mr J Scholey (Sevenoaks DC), Mr A Hills (Shepway DC), Mr G Lewin (Swale BC), Mr H Rogers (Tonbridge and Malling BC), Ms G Brown (KALC), Mr M Dobson (Upper Medway IDB) and Mr P Flaherty (Kent Fire and Rescue)

ALSO PRESENT: Mr C R Pearman

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Tant (Flood Risk Manager), Mr T Harwood (Resilience and Emergencies Manager) and Mr A Tait (Democratic Services Officer)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Mr T Norton, Mr C Lewis, Mr S Kenny and Mr S Short

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

13. Membership
(Item 1)

The Committee noted the appointment of Mr A Terry in place of Mr J Elenor.

14. Minutes of the meeting on 20 July 2015
(Item 4)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2015 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

15. Dates of meetings in 2016
(Item 5)

The Committee noted the following meeting dates for 2016:-

Tuesday, 8 March 2016;
Monday, 18 July 2016;
Monday, 14 November 2016.

16. Presentations
(Item 6)

(1) The Chairman welcomed the four speakers to the meeting. He informed the Committee that he had attended a two day exercise arranged by the Environment Agency, informed by the winter 2013/14 storms. This had been at Endeavour House in Addington. He had requested that all Members of the Committee be invited to

attend such events in the future as it would be of great interest to observe flooding preparedness and response activities at first hand.

(2) Tim Norton (Flood Resilience Team Leader, Environment Agency) gave a presentation entitled “Community Resilience in Kent: Flood Wardens.” He said that the 2013/14 floods had convinced him that action on Flood Wardens was necessary for three reasons. The first of these had been that the response of certain communities to the flooding had not been as good as it could have been. The second was the political imperative, as there had been a widespread view that something positive needed to be done. Thirdly, there was an identified need for all agencies involved to protect their reputations. Although they had worked well in 2013/14, the publicity had often been unfairly negative. Reputational damage needed to be avoided because it could become a factor hindering the effectiveness of future flood response. The solution lay in the development of a relationship of trust within vulnerable communities.

(3) Mr Norton went on to say that work had been undertaken to identify what communities and individuals could do to manage flood risk better, by responding more quickly and efficiently. Volunteers had been given basic training to enable them to understand who did what during a flooding incident, how to stay safe during a flood and where the information would be coming from. This had been complemented by the development of a *Flood Warden Handbook*. This described their roles and potential tasks and was accompanied by a flood warden pack in the form of a rucksack containing basic kit. The work stream which sat alongside the basic training was community level emergency planning.

(4) Mr Norton showed a map which identified the areas where new flood wardens had been trained. They were scattered around the County with the highest number in Faversham and along the Stour and the Nailbourne rivers.

(5) As the programme developed, the EA had become aware of two areas which were potential “deal breakers.” The first of these was the question of who should have responsibility for the Flood Wardens. The new model identified the top tier as the Multi Agency Command and Control structure during an incident, below them were the various Tactical Co-ordinating Groups. The reporting line to the Flood Wardens themselves would go through the District and Borough Councils.

(6) The second potential deal breaker was the question of Insurance. This would be delivered through the Parish Councils or the Boroughs/Districts. All Flood Wardens were now covered, provided that they had been properly trained and were carrying out their functions in the correct manner. It was recommended that each insuring authority should carry out an annual check to ensure that the volunteer insurance cover was still there.

(7) Mr Norton identified the things that were going well. There had been a rapid response to the need for action in support of communities and volunteers; there was a mutual understanding amongst the partners which were developing Flood Warden training; sufficient funding had been secured for the purchase of basic equipment for Flood Wardens; a good level of understanding had been developed for people involved with flood wardens; Flood Wardens were now integrated into the long term strategy for building resilient communities; and nearly 200 Flood Wardens had now been through the initial training.

(8) Mr Norton then said that there were a number of questions which were still being considered or worked through. It would be necessary to provide Flood Wardens with a basic role profile which would vary for each community. It needed to be recognised that the initial set up could be resource intensive but that it represented a good investment. Ongoing investment of resources would be required. The question of Insurance should be addressed from the onset. There was also a discussion which was still to be concluded as to whether a model should be developed for each individual community or whether it should be more generic and therefore more consistent. It was likely that the answer would take the form of a happy medium. It was also a challenge when there were various agencies involved in co-ordinating a strategic response that was community focussed.

(9) Mr Norton concluded his presentation by considering the road ahead. He said that thought still needed to be given to working out how to sustain the progress made. There was a risk that if no flooding occurred for a number of years, the number of Flood Wardens could decline. The Environment Agency was therefore arranging seminars and other events in order to maintain momentum. Another matter that needed to be addressed was that the EA was not resourced to work with each community where a flood warden had been trained. It was therefore going to be a matter of prioritising which communities to work with, as well as considering how it should be resourced. Some high risk communities still did not have any Flood Wardens and consideration would need to be given to working with them. The Districts and Boroughs would need to carry out exercises to ensure that they were aware of the Flood Wardens in their areas of responsibility and that they knew how to contact them. Finally, the work done in Kent needed to be shared with others, whilst the County itself would also need to integrate best practice developed in other authorities.

(10) The Chairman said that it would be a great challenge to maintain enthusiasm amongst volunteers if there were no major incidents. He suggested that Members of the Committee could be invited to attend future Flood Warden events so that they could learn from the session whilst underlining the great appreciation that the Committee placed on the work that they were prepared to do.

(11) Mrs Brown said that in Yalding, the 33 Flood Wardens kept in touch with one another through social events that were arranged every two months. It was essential to do so rather than assume that once the Flood Wardens had been trained there was nothing further that needed to be done until a flooding event occurred.

(12) Carl Lewis identified himself as a Tonbridge Flood Warden as well as one of the two Area Flood Warden Co-Ordinators. He said that there had been no Flood Wardens in Tonbridge before the 2013/14 flooding event. Following the event and after meetings involving Sir John Stanley, MP and the Borough Council it had been decided to urgently set out to recruit people. This had been achieved through the contributions of Tom Tugendhat, MP and advertisements in the newspapers.

(13) Mr Lewis said that communication was key. This could vary from door knocking to electronic communication and from advertising EA roadshows. This enabled Flood Wardens to tell the community that their role was not limited to emergency events but that they were there to support the community throughout the entire year.

(14) Dr Eddy asked what happened in those areas where there were only one or two wardens or when they were down to half strength when a flooding event occurred. Mr Lewis replied that even teams such as his own with 12 members did not have as many Wardens as they would like. His team had a primary First Aider as well as a back-up. Whenever he personally was on holiday, there was always someone identified as cover. Difficulties were being experienced in getting new people to join the team. This was partly because those most at risk saw often saw their own properties as taking priority whilst those not in those areas were not engaged. Tonbridge and Malling BC would shortly be starting a new recruitment campaign which would include social media. Other charity groups such as the Rotary Club were also being approached to see whether they could offer support and/or become involved. They were also aiming to recruit Incident Volunteers for those who were unable to commit to becoming Flood Wardens.

(15) Mr Hills noted that there were very few Flood Wardens in some high risk areas such as Romney Marsh (where there was only one). He asked whether those Parishes with greater numbers of Flood Wardens could allocate one of them to be accountable to each Parish Council. This would enable them to disseminate information from the EA to the Parish Council.

(16) The Chairman commented that it was important for Parish Councils to maintain momentum by regularly inviting local Flood Wardens and First Responders amongst others to their meetings.

(17) Mrs Brown said that it was a good idea for Parish Councils to work together. She added that areas such as her parish of Yalding had three rivers, each of which required a different response at different times. Nevertheless, it was important for Parishes to co-ordinate the way in which information would be disseminated to all the Flood Wardens themselves. A very good example of the need for this had occurred when a power cut had taken place at the same time as a flood.

(18) Mr Stuart Kenny (Water Lead Officer, Kent Search and Rescue) said that his organisation currently had some 130 members. 2015 had been a quieter year than usual. They had received about 60 call outs in respect of vulnerable or missing persons notified by Kent Police during the year. This contrasted with the overall figure of 86 in 2014. In 2007, this figure had been 25, indicating that operational capacity was increasing from year to year. This increase resulted from ever-improving relations with Kent Police as well as a growing awareness of what Kent Search and Rescue could do. The Police Search Advisers were generally (but not always) aware of Kent Search and Rescue's presence and capacity.

(19) Much of Kent Search and Rescue's work involved physically searching for people, both in daylight and darkness. Over the years they had developed a number of teams. They had a strong Dog Team and Mountain Bike Teams. They also had developed an excellent team of qualified Bank Searchers, who were able to carry out water-based searches for people who had fallen into the river. These Bank Searchers were not permitted to put themselves at risk. Their task was to locate people and identify the correct resource to recover them safely. There were now 36 Bank Searcher teams in the UK.

(20) Kent Search and Rescue had also started a Canoe and Kayak Team (two kayaks and two canoes and 15 trained members). This Team had participated in the recent tragic search at Leybourne Lake, using all its resources to carry out bank searches, complementing the rubber inflatables and divers used by Kent Fire. The Canoe and Kayak Team could only locate people on the water surface and was not equipped or trained to search underwater. They were able to call in sonar equipment from other authorities in support of their role.

(21) Kent Search and Rescue had also put together a resource of Flood Rescue Technicians. This consisted of 25 technicians, divided into five teams, whose qualification was underwritten by DEFRA. They were able to effect rescue using a sled or inflatable in water up to 1 metre deep, travelling up to 1 metre per second. This meant that they could not deploy in circumstances such as had been seen in Yalding where the water speed had reached 20 knots.

(22) Mr Kenny said that Kent Search and Rescue had deployed during the last flood in Yalding. They had been deployed during the day to knock on doors in order to encourage people to move. By 9pm, the water levels were up to their knees and ankles, which meant that they themselves were at risk.

(23) Mr (Steve Short (Chair, South East 4x4 Response) said that his organisation had 80 members in Kent. They were all equipped with 4 wheel drives and one third of them were Water Qualified. They had been formed some ten years earlier and had developed considerable professionalism and expertise over this time.

(24) South East 4x4 Response had deployed during the 2013/14 floods in Yalding and Tonbridge. They were well aware of the strong possibility that their help might be needed again. Its members carried out various tasks such as sandbagging, evacuation, carrying food, water and medical supplies to affected places, and supporting the Community Wardens.

(25) In response to a question from Mr Bowles, Mr Short said that all vehicles registered with South East 4x4 Response had to have yellow beacons flashing on their roofs. They bore logos so that the Emergency Services knew who they were. Each member also had to wear a high viz jacket.

(26) Mr Short explained that the cost of the work of the organisation was high. If a journey was classed as humanitarian, it would be paid for by KCC. The members' time was freely given in a voluntary capacity.

(27) South East 4x4 Response could be contacted in an emergency or if people wanted to join either through their website or the Kent Resilience Team.

(28) Mr Kenny said that Kent Search and Rescue and South East 4x4 Response worked together on a regular basis. The latter organisation often transported his members and emergency equipment to wherever they needed to go. They would help get people who needed the emergency services to get to the main highway, as ambulances were not allowed to leave tarmac. In addition, they always carried Kent Search and Rescue logos when working in support of them.

(29) The Chairman suggested that the next meeting should be preceded by a visit to Kent Air Ambulance, to which all the presenting organisations could be invited to

display their equipment. Mrs Brown offered The Lees at Yalding as an alternative venue if Kent Air Ambulance could not host it. The next meeting of the Committee could also be held there.

(30) RESOLVED that all four presenters be thanked for their presentation as well as for their organisations' enthusiasm and commitment to Flood Resilience in Kent.

17. Oral report on the Kent Resilience Forum Annual Severe Weather Exercise - Paul Flaherty, Kent Fire and Rescue
(Item 7)

(1) Mr Flaherty reported on the second Annual Severe Weather Exercise. He said that its purpose was to ensure that all the responding agencies within the County were prepared for winter. This involved a scenario which could then be discussed and evaluated afterwards.

(2) The 2015 event had involved a scenario of widespread flooding followed by high winds and snow. Participants had included the Environment Agency and Mark Rogers from the Met Office, who had based the scenario on an actual event which had occurred twenty five years earlier. Guest speakers had also been present to set out what their agencies could contribute to assist the emergency services.

(3) The event had been very well attended, involving 80 delegates, including the Kent Resilience Forum, Chief Executives or Director level support from the Districts and KCC as well as some Member attendance. Senior Managers from responding organisations had also been involved.

(4) Mr Flaherty said that the day had been very worthwhile, and had demonstrated the preparedness of the agencies concerned. A whole range of issues had been examined, including resourcing, equipment, and command and control arrangements. The work of the Severe Weather Advisory Group had been acknowledged. It had also been an opportunity to put into practice the work which had been done with the Flood Wardens. Their role formed a key part of the response as they represented eyes and ears on the ground, knew their local areas and were familiar with the local flood plans, and were the first point of contact for the emergency services when they arrived at the scene.

(5) The recent Flood Warden Seminar had been the first of its kind. This seminar had reinforced the crucial importance of their work. Kent was extremely fortunate to have some 200 Flood Wardens who had been suitably trained. This was a higher than any other part of the UK and meant that there was effectively a Flood Warden for every Parish to be able to access. The 50 or so volunteers at Kent Fire were also trained as Flood Wardens and were available to offer support as needed.

(6) Mr Flaherty then said that the helicopter used for the exercise was one of two which would be located at Lydd and replace the RAF search and rescue capability which had formerly been located at Manston. That service had now been contracted out.

(7) Mr Flaherty went on to inform the Committee that, in addition to Kent Search and Rescue, there was another group of volunteers which provided air support (Air

Search). People had made their aircraft available, which would enable a bird's eye view to identify the extent of the flooding when it occurred. Both Kent Fire and Kent Police now had access to a drone each. It was likely that by this time in 2016 there would be a combined figure of 4 drones enabling Fire and Police to do their own reconnaissance if necessary.

(8) A prestigious national award had been presented to the Kent Volunteer Sector Emergency Group by the Emergency Planning Society in recognition of the tremendous role played by volunteers in Kent and the service that they were providing.

(9) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

18. Environment Agency and Met Office Alerts and Warnings and KCC flood response activity since the last meeting
(Item 8)

(1) Mr Harwood referred to Minute 11 (3) concerning the June 20-15 multi-agency workshop to consider potential evacuation issues in Romney Marsh in the event of a major coastal flooding event. He said that this was part of a wider DEFRA East Coast flooding project: *The Use of Roads to Evacuate and Shelter People*. The report back from this project would take place on 3 December at the DEFRA Offices in Smith Square.

(2) Mr Flaherty informed the Committee that the 2016 Annual Severe Weather Exercise would be using the Romney Marsh scenario as its table top exercise.

(3) Mr Harwood referred to the Emergency Planning Society award to the Kent Voluntary Sector Emergency Group and said that it underlined the fact that volunteers were now integrally involved in so many aspects of Kent's resilience work, including flood response. They had recently been part of Exercise Beowulf on the Isle of Sheppey which had focussed on multi-agency oil pollution response.

(4) Mr Harwood informed the Committee that the total of Environment Agency flood alerts issued since July 2015 had now risen to 21 as a result of a recent event between Pegwell Bay and Deal. He warned that Kent was now just past the peak of the astronomical spring tide season and that more high tides were still expected in the coming winter period.

(5) Mr Bowles asked for the information contained in Appendix 3 of the report to be circulated to all Members and the Parishes.

(6) Mr Davies said that he was concerned about drainage infrastructure in relation to surface water flooding. He said that drains were not being cleared as often as they needed to be. In Tunbridge Wells, this matter was raised by all the Parish Councils and also by local residents. He suggested that Kent Highways, transportation and Waste should be informed of this local concern and asked to take appropriate steps to alleviate it.

(7) Mr Harwood said that he and Mr Tant were shortly due to meet the Drainage Manager to discuss winter preparedness. They would be discussing another of matters including local pumping capacity and capability.

(8) Mr Davies noted that in contrast to the Netherlands, privately owned ditches were often not maintained or even filled in. This seemed to be because the Dutch landowners had a legal responsibility to do so, unlike their UK counterparts.

(9) The Chairman replied to Mr Davies by saying that the obligation on landowners to clear ditches and drains was covered by the riparian ownership laws. He asked for an item on riparian ownership to be included on the agenda for the next meeting on March.

(10) Mr Hills said that one of the complications was that whilst Natural England was attempting to prevent over-zealous cleaning of dykes because of potential negative impacts upon wildlife, the IDBs were very supportive of doing exactly that. This meant that landowners were often not clear as to precisely what was expected of them.

(11) Dr Eddy asked whether high level water tables were expected in combination with the forecast high tides.

(12) Mr Harwood replied to Dr Eddy by saying that tide locking was potentially an issue during high tide episodes. High tides prevented ground and surface water from draining into the sea. There was also a specific urban issue where groundwater could drain into basements without anyone being aware of it. It was inevitable that water tables would rise in winter because trees and other vegetation were no longer sucking up the rainwater during the growing season. The Met Office was predicting that the weather would remain mild and unsettled at least until Christmas. This meant that there was a heightened threat of all forms of flooding, which required vigilance across the entire resilience community.

(13) Mrs Brown said that from Yalding's perspective, gullies were very well cleaned. The exception occurred when clearing them was practically problematic (including areas where parking was an issue). This would result in lengthy periods where no action to overcome the problem seemed to take place.

(14) Mr Pearman informed the Committee of a report on the drainage infrastructure which had been prepared two years earlier. This had concluded that the drainage infrastructure was not fit for purpose and had been historically under-resourced. It had identified problems with the system itself as well as the utilities which worked around the existing system.

(15) Mr Pearman continued by saying that there was no single solution to this problem. He advised that each District or Borough should have its own drainage manager, working with the Area Highways Manager, all of whom were experienced and were able to take action to overcome the problem (including full gully clearance if appropriate).

(16) Mr Pearman went on to say that he and the Highways officers had recently met to consider the problems in detail. He was very much aware that Sevenoaks was subject to flood risk. Debris within the drainage system often originated from properties further upstream. The responsibility was shared between the Parish Councils, the local landowners, the drainage engineers and the highways engineers. His own responsibility was to explain that there was no instant answer. If a problem was alleviated, it could often return very quickly. The most important thing was to

raise awareness and to ensure that people's first port of call was the local highways engineer through the Parish Councils rather than the emergency services. KCC did not have the resources to send an engineer to every blocked gully. The answer was known locally and that was where the problem-solving needed to start.

(17) Mr Dobson said that upon its creation, the Environment Agency had taken over a number of drainage responsibilities from the Internal Drainage Boards, and had returned many of them to the IDBs at a later stage due to their lack of capacity to take them on. He believed that drainage problems could be coped with more effectively if there were clear lines of responsibility focussed on a single agency.

(18) Mr Terry described the drainage problems in Vale Road in Broadstairs as an example of the immense problems when a soakaway ceased to function for an unknown reason. It had eventually emerged that many years earlier, a garage owner had poured oil through the drainage system, creating impermeable lining over the chalk walls of the soakaway. The result had been that this part of Broadstairs had been highly susceptible to flooding since just after the Second World War.

(19) Mr Tant said that heavy rainfall in August and September had caused local flooding events in parts of Kent. This had led KCC to carry out its legal duty to investigate these events, particularly in Tunbridge Wells. The findings were shortly due to be published.

(20) Mr Tant replied to a question from Mr Rogers by saying that the *Flood Risk to Communities* documents for Swale, Thanet and Sevenoaks were being prepared. The Maidstone and Tonbridge and Malling versions were due to be published shortly after some additional local consultation had taken place. The intention was that all of them would be published by the end of March 2016.

(21) Mr Bowles said that he had taken the Canterbury document to each of the Parish Council meetings in his constituency. They had all commented that a similar document for Swale would be very useful indeed.

(22) RESOLVED that the level of alerts received since the last meeting of the Committee be noted.