

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 Tuesday, 14 November 2023.

PRESENT: Mr A R Hills (Chairman), Mr D Crow-Brown, Mr P Cole, Ms M Dawkins and Mr M A J Hood

ALSO PRESENT: Jenni Hawkins, Cllr Mrs J Blandford, Mr G Brooker, Cllr P Garten and Mr D Goff.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Tant (Flood and Water Manager), Mr T Harwood (Resilience and Emergency Planning Manager) and Mr M Dentten (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

38. Declarations of Interest by Members in items on the Agenda
(Item 4)

No declarations were received.

39. Minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2023
(Item 5)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2023 were an accurate record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

40. Southern Water - Presentation
(Item 6)

This item was deferred to the next meeting of Kent Flood Risk Management Committee on 14 March 2024.

41. Environment Agency River Basin Management Plans - Presentation
(Item 7)

Laura Jones (Team Leader, Integrated Environment Planning, Environment Agency) and Jonathan Balkwill (Team Leader, Environment Programme, Environment Agency) were in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Jones and Mr Balkwill gave a presentation on River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs). The contents of the presentation included:

- a. Functions of RBMPs, to set the legally binding locally specific environmental objectives that underpin water regulation, including permitting and planning activities;
 - b. Investment programmes;
 - c. Aims of RBMPs to enhance nature, deliver the environmental objectives that contribute towards net zero, explain what can be funded in line with the government's current policy and funding and business cases for the investment needed;
 - d. An overview of the two catchments, South East and Thames, which cover Kent;
 - e. Waterbody classifications across Kent, with it noted that none were classified 'Good' due to a one out all out policy;
 - f. Catchment based approach and role of Catchment Coordinators;
 - g. A summary of fish flow schemes delivered in Kent; and
 - h. Partnership project delivery by default approach.
2. Following a question from a Member on the Environment Agency's responsibilities and funding of pumping stations in Minster-in-Thamet, Ms Jones agreed to confirm arrangements following the meeting.
 3. Mr Balkwill encouraged Members and partners to join Catchment Improvement Groups. He confirmed that each Catchment had a Management Plan.
 4. A Member asked whether the Environment Agency collaborated with farmer clusters. Mr Balkwill explained that whilst there was no current collaboration, it was being investigated in the Stour Catchment.
 5. The Chairman noted the importance of monitoring the work of and challenges experienced by the Environment Agency as well as exploring how partners could further assist it.
 6. The Chairman thanked Ms Jones and Mr Balkwill for their presentation and answers to the Committee's questions.

RESOVLED to note the content of the presentation.

42. Met Office - Presentation
(Item 8)

Mark Rogers (Civil Contingencies Advisor, Met Office) was in virtual attendance for this item.

1. Mr Rogers gave a presentation. The contents of the presentation included:

- a. Review of weather in winter 2022/23, summer 2023 and autumn 2023 to September;
 - b. Storm Ciarán, with it noted that the highest UK wind speed (78mph) had been record in Kent at Langdon Bay and that in excess of 40mm of rain had been experienced in many areas;
 - c. Storm preparation;
 - d. Role of the Met Office in warning, informing and civil contingencies, including the National Severe Weather Warning Service (NSWWS);
 - e. Weather warning criteria;
 - f. Severe Weather Framework;
 - g. Flood Guidance Statement (FGS), as a 5-day outlook at whether any flooding is expected across England and Wales; and
 - h. November 2023 to January 2024 3-month weather outlook.
2. Mr Rogers explained following a question, that the UK's storm names were coordinated with Met Éireann and the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute. He noted that there were aspirations for other grouping in Europe to be merged to improve public recognition and coordination. He added that the names were chosen to reflect the names and cultures of each country's population.
 3. A Member asked whether climate change had impacted the frequency and severity of storms in the UK. Mr Rogers explained that there was no conclusive evidence that climate change had affected storm severity and that the position of the jet stream was a greater factor.
 4. In response to a question, Mr Rogers explained that the number of yellow weather warnings issued had been reduced but were still issued in line with the Weather Impact Matrix.
 5. A Member asked whether Storm Ciarán reflected a trend of storms earlier in the year. Mr Rogers confirmed that whilst summer had been longer over recent years, there was no trend of earlier storms. He noted that historic severe storms such as the great storm of 1987 had occurred in October.
 6. The Chairman asked if increased temperatures in the Atlantic Ocean had made it more likely that the UK could be affected by hurricanes. Mr Rogers reassured the Committee that whilst more significant storms were affecting the southern Atlantic and that as these travel north the UK may be effected by ex-hurricanes, it was unlikely that the UK would experience hurricanes. He noted the difficulty of forecasting ex-hurricanes.
 7. The Chairman thanked Mr Rogers for his presentation and answers to the Committee's questions.

RESOLVED to note the content of the presentation.

43. Environment Agency and Met Office Alerts and Warnings and KCC severe weather response activity
(Item 9)

1. Mr Harwood introduced the report which updated Members on water resources, weather statistics, Environment Agency and Met Office warnings, and flood response activity since the last meeting of the Committee. He provided the latest figures for alerts and warnings issued following the publication of the report, with 61 flood alerts, including 31 fluvial, and 43 yellow weather warnings, including 24 thunderstorms, issued for the period 12 July – 14 November 2023. He contrasted the alerts with the same period in 2022, which saw 9 flood alerts. He noted that Storm Ciarán had primarily impacted the south and east Kent coast. The emergency planning and response activities in Kent, including the operation of a severe weather advisory group were explained. The prevailing exceptional marine temperatures were brought to the Committee's attention, with it explained that average temperatures off the Dover coast at the start of November were 15°C, 2.2°C higher than the ten-year average. Regarding flood response, he informed the Committee that the Medway Confluence Plan was activated, though the threshold for evacuations was not met. It was noted that there had been evacuations following Storm Ciarán required for some properties on Romney Marsh, with intense localised rainfall and pumping station technical issues the main factors. He concluded by highlighting multi-agency flood response training delivered by Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) in October, with the importance of agencies training and responding together emphasised.
2. A Member asked whether there was an opportunity to enhance the county's network of Flood Wardens to support emergency responders and flood risk management authorities. Mr Harwood acknowledged that there was not universal Flood Warden coverage across Kent and that the Environment Agency, who were responsible for the scheme, continued to promote uptake for the role locally.
3. A Member asked that the Environment Agency report to the Committee on the role of Flood Wardens, including the ways to promote the role and improve volunteer retention.
4. Following a question from a Member, Mr Harwood confirmed that the decision to close schools during severe weather was ultimately the responsibility of individual schools and was not mandated by KCC.
5. Mr Harwood confirmed, following a question from a Member, that all local utility companies participated in the severe weather advisory group and were involved in response co-ordination through the Tactical Co-ordinating Group.

RESOLVED to note the alerts and warnings received since the last meeting of the Committee.

44. Local Flood Risk Management Strategy

(Item 10)

1. Mr Tant introduced the report which updated the Committee on the development of Kent's third Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and presented the draft Strategy prior to public consultation between 22 November 2023 and 30 January 2024. He explained that the draft Strategy addressed how local flooding would be managed over the next ten years, with the intention for it be reviewed annually following implementation in 2024. It was noted that the draft Strategy's objectives remained in line with the current 2017-23 Strategy, as there had been no evidence that the current priorities were outdated. He reminded Members that implementation of Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 was expected during the lifetime of the Strategy.
2. Regarding section 5.2.3 of the draft Strategy, a Member asked whether it could be used as a mechanism for requiring new developments to reduce their flood risk, irrespective of their impact on it. Mr Tant explained that that section was aspirational. He added that local planning authorities could adopt planning policies that require developers to mitigate off-site flood risk, as part of their local plan, which wasn't common, and KCC encouraged planning authorities to take this approach more often.
3. A Member asked whether a water cycle strategy would support the new Strategy in reducing surface water flooding. Mr Tant explained that whilst water cycle strategies were valuable, they were primarily focused on water supply and wastewater disposal rather than flood risk. He added that strategic flood risk assessments were the most effective vehicle for addressing the issue.

RESOLVED to:

- a) Note the report and draft Local Flood Risk Management Strategy; and
- a) Provide comments prior to public consultation.