

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Flood Risk Management Committee held in the Stour Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 9 March 2010.

PRESENT: Mr R E King (Chairman), Mr D L Brazier, Mr M J Harrison, Mr W Richardson and Mr M J Vye.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr T Harwood (Senior Emergency Planning Officer), Miss E Holliday (Team Leader Natural Environment & Coast) and Mr A Tait (Democratic Services Officer)

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M Douch (Environment Agency).

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

6. Minutes of the meeting on 14 January 2010

(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2010 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

7. Roles and responsibilities in flood risk management - Oral Presentation by Mark Douche from the Environment Agency

(Item 4)

(1) Mr Mark Douch (Environment Agency Flood and Coastal Risk Manager – Kent and East Sussex) began his presentation by explaining the vulnerability of the County of Kent to the risk of flooding. The County was bounded by a large stretch of coastline and contained an above average number of river systems. Troughs of low pressure building up over Scotland led to rising sea levels off the east coast which resulted in a “North Sea Surge.” Another risk was posed by the large waves created in the huge stretches of the Atlantic Ocean to the South West of England.

(2) Mr Douch also explained the risk of fluvial flooding such as had occurred south of Canterbury in October 2000. Here the water levels had built up slowly through long periods of persistent rainfall. Eventually the drainage system had been overwhelmed, leading to a long period of sustained flooding.

(3) Mr Douch then set out the principal areas of responsibility. These were:-

- a) Environment Agency: Main river systems and sea defences.
- b) Local Authorities: Ordinary water courses (over 1000 kms in Kent) and coastal protection (e.g.cliffs).
- c) Internal drainage Boards: Identified water courses and ordinary water courses in Drainage areas.

(4) The Environment Agency had responsibility for mapping and development and also provided a Flood Risk Warning service. This had diversified from a point 15

years earlier when the traditional loud hailer had been the only means for communicating a Warning. Modern communication methods now included the internet, e-mails, texting, phoning as well as the traditional loud hailer when appropriate. There were three levels of Warning: "Flood Watch", "Flood Warning" and "Severe Flood Warning." The timescales varied in that Coastal Flooding Warnings could be given 12 hours beforehand whereas Fluvial Flooding was far more difficult to predict.

(5) The Environment Agency was also responsible for building defences. The cost at Whitstable had been £60m. They also built demountable flood defences (e.g. Sandwich) and undertook river maintenance at an overall cost of @ £10m per year.

(6) Mr Douch moved on to the three Kentish Internal Drainage Boards (Upper and Lower Medway, Great Stour and Romney Marsh). These consisted of elected Members (about 28 in number) who were directly elected local landowners and/or District Council Members. They were funded by a local levy. They had their own by-laws, carried out enforcement activity, paid a levy to the Environment Agency for capital schemes and acted as statutory planning consultees.

(7) The Local Authorities carried out maintenance and enforcement. They acted as the planning authority and now took the lead role in local partnerships. In two-tier local authority areas, the 1st Tier authority undertook the strategic overview whilst the 2nd Tier authorities led on the technical side.

(8) Mr Douch then described the role of the water companies. They took responsibility for critical infrastructure (i.e. the security of the water supply, foul water, surface water and drainage.) One of the recommendations of the Pitt Review had been the identification of fragile areas. These could not be publicly identified for security and commercial reasons, but this information was held by the Police.

(9) There were three levels of strategic control in the event of a crisis. These were named "Gold", "Silver" and "Bronze". All three levels fed into COBRA (the Government agency). Strategic Gold crises occurred very rarely – the last incident had been in 2000. In this eventually, resources were managed across an entire area. The Police identified the main area for protection and all agencies supported this goal. Even the Military could become involved.

(10) Strategic Silver crises were regional involving (amongst others) the Police, Fire and Rescue, Local Authorities, Water and Phone Companies. The last Silver crisis had occurred in Hastings in the summer of 2009.

(11) Strategic Bronze crises occurred almost daily at a local level.

(12) In response to a question, Mr Douch said that the Environment Agency's Capital programme could be viewed on its website. There were now clear criteria in place for determining which projects needed to be prioritised. These took into account cost, the number of people to be protected and the lifetime of the protective measure proposed. The effectiveness of the project was monitored by Defra upon completion. In Kent, 97% of flood protection assets were assessed as being of good or better standard.

(13) Mr Douch informed the Committee that the work of the Environment Agency had changed over the past 10 years. There had been no prioritisation of work at that time and an attempt had been made to accomplish everything. This had led to an over-emphasis on land drainage. Now its work was properly targeted to achieve the most important results within the constraints of the resources on offer.

(14) RESOLVED that Mr Douch be thanked for his presentation and that his offer to provide copies of the presentation slides be accepted.

8. KCC Flood Response Plan

(Item 5)

(1) Mr Harwood introduced the Flood Response Plan as a living document that provided a concise overview of the risks faced within the county of Kent. This document also set out the role of Kent County Council and its partner agencies in responding to flooding incidents.

(2) The document sat alongside the pan-Kent multi-agency Flood Plan, led by the Environment Agency as well as thirteen Local Agency Flood Plans (the twelve districts and Medway Council).

(3) Mr Harwood then explained that one of the lessons learned following the flooding in Cumbria was that there had been little or no understanding of that county's Plan due to lack of awareness across partner agencies. A much higher profile was therefore needed for all flood response plans. Kent's Plan was being widely circulated within KCC and had been posted on the internet. It had also been covered in the "Kent on Sunday" newspaper.

(4) Mr Harwood briefly referred to the "Flooding Sources" section of the Flood Response Plan. Fluvial Flood Risk was not limited to the Medway and Stour River catchments. For example, Pent Stream in Folkestone had historically caused localised flooding.

(5) During discussion of the document and its action plans, it was agreed that the Committee would need to be informed of the outcome of the validation exercises performed in conjunction with the District Councils.

(6) Mr Harwood agreed to send all Members of the Committee a list detailing all the training events. He issued a standing invitation to the Committee Members to attend.

(7) Mr Harwood noted Mr Vye's comment that Parish Councils and Voluntary Organisations could have a role to play in protecting vulnerable people in the event of a flood. He said that a lot of work had been put in to community resilience and identifying the most flood-vulnerable areas and communities.

(8) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

9. New Flood Risk Management responsibilities for KCC - Oral Presentation by Elizabeth Holliday (KCC Natural Environment and Coast Team Manager)
(Item 6)

(1) Miss Holliday informed the Committee that the Flood and Water Management Bill was likely to receive Royal Assent before the General Election, but if it did not, there was cross-party support for both the Bill and its associated funding. Therefore it was unlikely to be affected if there were a change of government. There would also be a Part II of the Bill to pick up items not covered by the current Bill – Parts I and II would be consolidated at some point in the future. Defra had stressed that there would be a lead-in period rather than an instant commencement and that this would be supported by a phased programme of implementation and guidance from central government.

(2) Under the Bill KCC would be the Lead Local Flood Authority for Kent. Interviews for the new Flood Risk Management Officer post would be held in mid March with the successful candidate starting early in the new financial year.

(3) One of the provisions contained within the Bill was for the development of local partnerships. In Kent this would probably take the form of a Kent Strategic Flood Partnership which would be complimented by various Sub-Groups. These would operate at officer level, reporting back to the Flood Risk Management Committee. Defra had not been prescriptive about the form that local partnerships should take as they wanted them to be developed in response to local circumstances.

(4) Miss Holliday explained that the County Council had taken the lead role in the production of the Dover Surface Water Management Plan, working in partnership with Dover DC, the Environment Agency and Southern Water. Jacobs had been appointed as consultants for this work.

(5) Mr Douch (Environment Agency) explained that the Environment Agency was the lead authority for the management of coastal erosion in coastal areas which were below sea level. The District Councils had responsibility for land above sea level. Work needed to be undertaken across Kent to determine available resources and capacity to deal with the new responsibilities and identify where further resources were required.

(6) Miss Holliday went on to discuss the Flood Risk Management Strategy. KCC as the Lead Local Flood Authority would have responsibility for its development and application. The Strategy needed to be aligned to the national strategy which was to be developed by the Environment Agency. Development of a Kent Strategy would commence once the national strategy had been published. Some ground work in terms of intelligence building could nevertheless be undertaken in the meantime.

(7) The scrutiny mechanisms would be the responsibility of this Committee, which would need to consider how best this work should be undertaken. There was currently a question about which authority should have the power to enforce action that had not been undertaken.

(8) Miss Holliday turned to the question of sustainable drainage systems (SUDS). It was not yet clear whether the function of approving systems would be the responsibility of the County or District Authorities.

(9) Miss Holliday then referred to the EU Flood Directive that required the development of preliminary flood risk assessments by June 2011. Commencement of this work was awaiting determination of the significant risk criteria, which was anticipated for April 2010. As this was a matter of the highest importance, a separate report on this Directive would be given to the Committee at a future meeting.

(10) Miss Holliday informed the Committee that £36m had been set aside by the Government to finance the work set out in the Bill. This would be shared between the various lead Authorities. Defra and the LGA were still considering the details of how this funding should be allocated. KCC had already received @ £100k for the Dover Surface Water Management Plan.

(11) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

10. Dates of future meetings and future presentations

(Item 7)

(1) The Committee noted that Defra would not be able to attend the Committee meeting on 26 April 2010.

(2) RESOLVED that the following meeting dates and programme of future presentations be agreed as set out below:-

Monday, 26 April 2010: Regional Flood Defence Committee and Environment Agency;

Friday, 28 May 2010: Kent Police and Kent Resilience Forum, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, Southern Water;

Thursday, 29 July 2010: a District Council, Internal Drainage Board, Defra.