

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

KENT FLOOD RISK AND WATER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Kent Flood Risk and Water Management Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 14 March 2024.

PRESENT: Mr A R Hills (Chairman), Mr D L Brazier, Mr D Crow-Brown, Ms M Dawkins and Mrs M McArthur

ALSO PRESENT: Cllr Mrs J Blandford, Mr G Brooker, Mrs G Brown, 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

45. Declarations of Interest
(Item 4)

No declarations were made.

46. Minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2023
(Item 5)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2023 were an accurate record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

47. Terms of Reference
(Item 6)

RESOLVED to note the Committee's updated Terms of Reference, as approved by County Council on 16 November 2023.

48. Southern Water - Clean Rivers and Seas Taskforce - Presentation
(Item 7)

Jon Yates (Pathfinder Delivery Lead) was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Yates gave a presentation. The contents of his presentation included:
 - a. The Ofwat Accelerated Infrastructure Delivery Project;

- b. The Clean Rivers and Seas Taskforce Accelerated Plan, which included £9m of investment in Kent targeting five overflows, delivering 1 treatment works optimised, 2 pumping station optimisations, 8 surface water misconnection redirected, 2,000 household downpipes fitted with slow the flow measures and 10 roadside sustainable drainage schemes installed. It was stated that these measures would lead to a minimum 20% reduction in spills by April 2025;
 - c. Optimisation at the Swalecliffe Treatment Works, which had achieved a 20% reduction in long sea outfall events;
 - d. Centaur Gates and the development of a programme of works to make Whitstable the first Intelligent Catchment, utilising forecast rainfall, real time network information and AI to manage the infrastructure in a different efficient way to reduce CSO usage across the catchment and 37 pumping stations;
 - e. Completed surface water connection works in Whitstable and Deal;
 - f. Planned sustainable drainage system schemes in Whitstable, Deal and Margate;
 - g. Slow the Flow and installation of water butts and planters in Whitstable, with a future focus on targeting large industrial roof spaces;
 - h. Clean Rivers and Seas Regional Plan. It was confirmed that over 1,000 overflows would be investigated in the region between 2025-30 and that the Plan's budget had increased from £750m to £1bn;
 - i. Members were invited to use the interactive Clean Rivers and Seas Regional Plan map, which included details on when works were planned, how much had been invested and their expected impact at www.southernwater.co.uk/water-for-life/clean-rivers-and-seas-plan/map; and
 - j. Confirmation that a new Beachbuoy app would be released later in Spring 2024.
2. A Member commended Southern Water on its recent response during water outages in Thanet.
 3. Following a comment from a Member, Mr Yates stated that whilst Southern Water were not a statutory consultee on major planning applications, they were on local plans and worked hard with local planning authorities to be part of the conversation on planned development.
 4. A Member asked to what extent major residential developments contributed to greater levels of surface water flooding. Mr Yates stated that new major developments had not significantly worsened flooding and that smaller developments contributed to a larger extent as a result of surface water run off connections into foul. He confirmed that Southern Water had worked with designers and developers to ensure that sustainable drainage systems were

installed effectively. Mr Tant added that KCC had been a statutory consultee on surface water flooding for major developments since 2015 and that generally sustainable drainage systems had been used effectively and where there were legacy connections to the sewer, KCC had ensured that measures were in place to slow the flow rate or disconnect them. He noted that surface water flooding was more likely to be caused by older developments, particularly from the 1980s and 1990s, where SuDs were not used and connections to the sewer were common and where gardens had been paved and extensions added that increased the area the sewage infrastructure was initially designed for.

5. In response to a question from a Member, Mr Yates confirmed that the Beachbuoy system monitored the water quality of designated bathing areas only.
6. A Member asked whether Southern Water had met its storm overflow reduction targets and for assurance that their long plans were ambitious. Mr Yates confirmed that the two-year target to reduce storm overflows at Swalecliffe by 16% had been exceeded, with 23% achieved and that going forward a minimum 30% reduction was the target across the Whitstable catchment. He stated that it was the company's ambition that all targets be exceeded to accelerate the reduction of storm overflows.
7. Following a question from a Member on the impact of water butts and planters, as well as the work which could be done in Tonbridge to reduce surface water, Mr Yates explained that each catchment had its own characteristics which required bespoke solutions. He confirmed that exercises had been carried out to understand the Tonbridge catchment and that smart water butts and planters would play a part in future solutions to slow the flow in urban areas across the county.

RESOLVED to note the content of the presentation.

49. Environment Agency - Flood Wardens - Presentation
(Item 8)

Emma Crofts (Flood Resilience Engagement Advisor, Environment Agency) and Sacha Taylor (Communications and Engagement Officer, Kent Resilience Team, Kent Fire and Rescue Service) were in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Crofts and Mrs Taylor gave a presentation. The contents of the presentation included:
 - a. Methods used for spreading flood awareness, including social media, local activities, direct community messaging, Flood Action Campaign and communication through partners;
 - b. Key messages, including checking local flood risk, signing up for warnings and alerts, making a flood plan, preparing your home and helping your community;

- c. An overview of Flood Warden and warning take up across Kent;
 - d. The role of Flood Wardens before a flood, in raising awareness, developing resilience and reporting;
 - e. Their role during, in helping to coordinate the community flood plan, share information and encourage residents to take action;
 - f. Their role after, in assisting with post-flood clear up, sharing messages and collecting post-flood data;
 - g. Training and promotion, including the delivery of training online and use of Communities Prepared and locally produced materials, equipment provided to new Wardens and the future evolution of the role;
 - h. Community resilience and flood plans and the distribution of the 29 plans in place across Kent;
 - i. The Kent Resilience Team's support of the Flood Warden programme, through promotion of flood warden recruitment and training events as well as engagement with KALC, parish councils, town councils and residents' associations;
 - j. Kent Prepared's Improving Community Resilience guide for parish and town councils available at: www.kentprepared.org.uk/improving-community-resilience; and
 - k. The Kent Resilience Forum community resilience working group's role in drawing together partners from the emergency services, Environment Agency, local authority emergency planning and community officers, KALC, parish and town councils to investigate collective efforts and further multi-agency approaches to community preparedness.
2. Following a question from a Member, on how local interest in flooding could be increased and maintained in areas without wardens which experienced surface water flooding, Mrs Crofts explained that it required increasing the understanding of local flood risk whilst also explaining how residents could have agency to organise a response to severe weather events. She agreed to provide interested Members with material for promoting the Flood Warden role in their divisions.
 3. Members commented that regular dialogue and community events were important ways of increasing Flood Warden retention.
 4. A Member commended the locality specific literature circulated in Tonbridge to raise awareness of flooding and emphasised the importance of community flood walks and audits for increasing the understanding of flood risk. They noted their support for expanding the Flood Warden role to include community resilience more broadly, with the support of the Kent Resilience Team.

5. The Chair emphasised the importance of enhancing the Flood Warden role by adopting new technologies such as an app reporting system to support local information sharing, preparation and resilience.

RESOLVED to note the content of the presentation.

50. The Wildlife Trusts - Coastal nature-based solutions to flooding - Presentation
(Item 9)

Ali Morse (Water Policy Manager, The Wildlife Trusts and Independent Member for Conservation, Southern Regional Flood and Coastal Committee) was in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Morse gave a presentation. The contents of her presentation included:
 - a. An overview of Kent's coastal habitats, including the distribution of sea grass and salt marsh;
 - b. An explanation of nature-based solutions, as actions to protect, manage and restore natural or modified ecosystems to address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, with simultaneous benefit to people and the environment;
 - c. The goal of nature-based solutions to reduce coastal flood and erosion risks through promoting natural beach, wetland, reef, and dune processes;
 - d. Changing coastal erosion as well as tidal and fluvial flood risk in Kent;
 - e. Medway Estuary and Swale Flood and Coastal Risk Management Strategy, which sets out the best economic, environmental and technically appropriate approach to managing flood and coastal erosion risk over the next 100 years; and
 - f. The financial benefits of coastal wetlands in providing storm protection.
2. Following a question from a Member, Mrs Morse explained that shoreline management plans determined the intervention necessary for a section of coastline, using one of the following approaches: hold the line (maintain or upgrade protection from flooding or erosion by holding the shoreline in broadly the same position), no active intervention (maintain or encourage a more natural coastline, which may involve discussing adaptation to the risk from flooding or erosion), managed realignment (change the position of the shoreline in a controlled way, such as by slowing erosion or creating areas of habitat to help manage flooding) or advance the line (actively move shoreline defences significantly seawards).
3. Mrs Morse explained the positive impact sea grass and salt marsh had on carbon absorption as well as storm protection, following a question from a Member.

4. The importance of protecting existing sea grass as well as the creation of new sea grass beds was emphasised by Mrs Morse, in response to a question from a Member. Regarding suitable areas for new beds, she noted that good water quality was a key requirement.

RESOVLED to note the content of the presentation.

51. Environment Agency and Met Office Alerts and Warnings and KCC severe weather response activity
(Item 10)

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, confirming that there had been 157 flood alerts (116 fluvial and 41 coastal) and the Thames Barrier had been closed 13 times for operational reasons. He noted that February had seen 242% of the long-term rainfall total falling in Kent and that temperatures had been 3.2°C above the 1990-2020 long-term average. Rising ground water levels and high river flows in East Kent were highlighted. Exercise Dryad, a multi-agency scenario carried out in the Folkestone and Hythe District in November was brought to the Committee's attention, the benefit to preparedness and agency rapid response was stressed.
2. Mr Harwood confirmed that Bewl Water had begun impounding water following a series of works and that owing to the significant rainfall in the period the shortfall had been accounted for.

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