

From: Tony Hills, Chairman, Kent Flood Risk and Water Management Committee

To: Scrutiny Committee – 4 December 2024

Subject: Kent Flood Risk and Water Management Committee Annual Report

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report provides the Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the work of the Kent Flood Risk Management for the period November 2023 – November 2024.

Recommendation: The Committee is asked to note the Kent Flood Risk and Water Management Committee Annual Report.

1. Introduction

1.1 This is the Kent Flood Risk and Water Management Committee's (KFRMC) third Annual Report to the Scrutiny Committee since the May 2021 election. The KFRMC has met on four occasions since the last report brought to Scrutiny Committee on 1 November 2023, with meetings in November 2023, March, July, and November 2024. Future meetings are scheduled for February 2025, April 2025 and July 2025.

1.2 The topics covered during this period were:

- Southern Water – Clean Rivers and Seas Taskforce
- South East Water – Water Resources Management Plan
- Environment Agency – Flood Wardens
- Environment Agency River Basin Management Plans
- Environment Agency and Met Office Alerts and Warnings
- The Wildlife Trusts- Coastal nature-based solutions to flooding
- Southern Gas Network – risk of flooding to gas network
- Met office review
- Water management solutions for Romney Marsh area
- Local Flood Risk Management Strategy
- Kent Flood Resilience

2. Committee meeting on 14 November 2023

2.1 Environment Agency River Basin Management Plans

1. The Environment Agency addressed the Committee. 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.

2.2 Met Office

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 wind speed (78mph) had been record in Kent at Langdon Bay and that in excess of 40mm of rainfall 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 outlook

3. **Committee meeting on 14 March 2024**

3.1 Southern Water Clean Rivers and Seas Taskforce Update

1. Southern Water updated the Committee. The contents of the 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.

3.2 Environment Agency – Flood Wardens

The Met Office 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.

3.3 The Wildlife Trust

The Committee received 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.

4. Committee meeting on 16 July 2024

4.1 Southern Water Clean Rivers and Seas Taskforce Update

The committee received a presentation. The contents of the presentation included:

- a) An overview of Combined Sewer Overflows;
- b) Rivers and Seas Watch;
- c) Optimisation at Whitstable and Deal; surface water connections at Whitstable; Sustainable drainage systems (SuDs) schemes in Whitstable, Deal and Margate; and, planters and water butts.

4.2 Southern Gas Network (SGN) – risk of flooding to gas network

SGN presented on what happens when water enters the gas network. The contents of her presentation included:

- a) What happens when there is water ingress;
- b) Communication with affected customers and incident support;
- c) How SGN finds and removed water from gas network.

5. Committee meeting on 20 November 2024

5.1 South East Water – Water Resources Management Plan

South East Water presented to the committee on their Water Resources Management Plan, outlining:

- a) Key dates leading up to the delivery of the plans from 2025;
- b) How the water management plan has been developed and who has been involved;

- c) The approach to regional water resources planning and how challenges are being addressed;
- d) KCC's role in the plan.

6. Future activities

- 6.1 The Committee will maintain its two-pronged approach, continuing to receive updates on how flood risk management authorities are adapting to climate change, whilst also monitoring the responses to current severe weather events. A continued emphasis will be placed on holding partners to account for their performance and encouraging natural solutions to flood risk management. Progress has been made in engaging with the district and borough councils and the most recent meeting in November 2024 saw 4 guests, cabinet members from district councils joining the meeting and there will be continued efforts to include guests from Kent's district councils.
- 6.2 The Committee's next meeting is scheduled for 5 February 2025, with planned business including:
 - Southern Water – Investment 2025-30 and Kent initiatives
 - Environment Agency – how water quality is managed
 - Affinity Water – Water Resources Management Plan
 - Environment Agency River Basin Management Plans
 - (KCC) Drains Update
 - Role of Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs)
 - Environment Agency and Met Office Alerts and Warnings

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 Kent Flood Risk and Water Management Committee maintains an important overview and scrutiny function in receiving regular reports on the work carried out by flood risk management authorities in Kent as well as climatic projections which inform its future business. There has been an ongoing focus on programming of agenda items providing information and education for Members and guests.
- 7.2 Climate change continues to have the effect of increasing the threat flooding and other severe weather events pose on the county and its communities. The Committee's role is to examine how KCC and its partner flood risk management authorities are working together to reduce the risk and respond to events.

8. Recommendation

The Committee is asked to note the Kent Flood Risk and Water Management Committee Annual Report.

9. Background Documents

None

10. Contact Details

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