

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Flood Risk Management Committee held in the Medway Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Monday, 23 May 2011.

PRESENT: Mr R E King (Chairman), Mr D L Brazier, Mr M J Harrison, Mr C Hibberd, Mrs P A V Stockell Mr M J Vye

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Tant (Flood Risk Management Officer), Mr T Harwood (Senior Emergency Planning Officer) Mr A Tait (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

9. Minutes of the meeting on 28 January 2010

(Item 3)

RESOLVED that subject to the amendment of Minute 2 (4) to indicate that “both KCC and the Environment Agency were committed to and working towards this goal” the Minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2011 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

10. Exercise Watermark feedback

(Item 4)

(1) Mr Harwood reported that a number of Members of the Committee had visited Kent Police HQ on 10 March 2011 in order to see the multi-agency Strategic Response Unit in operation during Exercise Watermark (a national wide-area flood response exercise).

(2) Mr Harwood said that the exercise scenario had been much more demanding than expected, involving the need for the total evacuation of some 30,000 people from the town of Sheerness and surrounding areas. The Multi-Agency Strategic Co-ordinating Group, chaired by Chief Supt Alastair Hope had been praised by the UK and French Government observers for the effectiveness of its response. The close and professional working relationship between the three participating local authorities (KCC, Medway Council and Swale BC) was specifically raised as a positive outcome at the multi-agency exercise debrief.

(3) The exercise had tested the ability of the partner agencies to evacuate and shelter great numbers of people, thus requiring optimum use of available resources. As a learning point, work was now well underway to pre-identify “evacuation and shelter hubs” where large numbers of people could be accommodated at a single destination (such as the Oakwood complex in Maidstone or the University of Kent at Canterbury) and the transportation logistics to support them. The Kent County Council’s Rest Centre Guidelines were currently being updated to take account of this work.

(4) Mr Harwood said that Exercise Watermark had provided many learning points in terms of the need to develop improved logistics for evacuation, shelter and identification of vulnerable people. Improved arrangements were also needed to improve local community resilience. To this end, an event was planned for a mid Kent conference venue. It would take place on Saturday, 30 July and would involve the KALC and invited residents associations (representing unparished areas within an identified flood risk zone). Attendees would be provided with a CD containing a template of a community resilience plan for completion by their organisation, together with other supporting information. Mr Harwood agreed to inform the Committee Members of the details once the arrangements for this event were confirmed.

(5) Mr Harwood explained that a “league table” had been produced which identified those communities most vulnerable to flooding. Local Members were being asked to assist in providing local knowledge (including local organisations which might be in a position to support). Particular emphasis for this Member local knowledge was placed on urban and unparished areas such as Sheerness.

(6) Members of the Committee commented that they had been impressed by the calmness and competence they had observed during their visit to Police HQ. Mr Harwood agreed to circulate the debrief report from Exercise Watermark, which would be available in mid June.

(7) The Chairman asked to what extent the broadcast media had been involved in the Exercise. Mr Harwood replied that there had been a media cell which had provided both real and simulated media involvement. A follow-up exercise “Exercise Saturn” (also involving the broadcast media) would be taking place later that week, simulating a flooding emergency impacting upon Dungeness “A” station. This would test the technical assets of KCC and its contractors, including the logistics of mobilising and moving significant quantities of plant and other assets at short notice.

(8) RESOLVED that the report on the effectiveness of the response to the major flooding event simulated by Exercise Watermark be noted, together with the lessons to be learned.

11. Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment

(Item 5)

(1) A brief written report had been circulated to members of the Committee before the meeting and was also tabled at the meeting.

(2) Mr Tant reported that the Environment Agency had identified no part of the administrative area of Kent as a Flood Risk Area (i.e. one at risk of surface water flooding), although the County’s overall rating was the highest in the country. Ten areas in England (including Chatham/Gillingham) had been identified as Flood Risk Areas.

(3) Mr Tant then summarised the purpose of the Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PFRA). It was to provide an overview of local flood risk from surface water, groundwater and ordinary watercourses. It would achieve this by collating historic flood evidence and identifying areas of future flood risk and significant flood risk. The definition of an area of significant flood risk was one which would affect

30,000 people or more and where the likelihood of an occurrence was 1 every 200 years.

(4) Mr Tant commented that the benefit of having no Flood Risk Areas in Kent was that it enabled the County to develop its own priorities. Kent would not now need to undertake any further work on the Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment once it had been submitted to the Environment Agency by the deadline date of 22 June 2011. Kent's response would not recommend that the Environment Agency should amend the national flood map.

(5) Members of the Committee commented that the terms "Significant Flood Risk" and "Flood Risk Area" were likely to confuse the public because it would be unclear to them that these definitions applied to surface water only and did not include fluvial and coastal flooding (where the risk was usually greater).

(6) Mr Tant informed the Committee that the PFRA would contain a table dividing the County into 48 areas, assessing them in terms of the risk from 1 in 200 year surface water events and ranking each area according to the number of dwellings at risk.

(7) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

12. Local Flood Risk Management Strategy

(Item 6)

(1) Mr Tant informed the Committee that the County Council had to prepare a Local Flood Risk Management Strategy. This would relate purely to local flooding (from surface water, groundwater and ordinary watercourses). This Strategy would use the PFRA process to identify target areas.

(2) DEFRA would provide direct funding for this work. Kent would receive £260k in 2011/12 rising to £750k in each of the four years from 2012/13.

(3) Preliminary Flood Studies would be undertaken in (1) Thames Gateway (including Swanley), (2) Swale and Canterbury, (3) Thanet, (4) Maidstone, the Medway Gap, and (5) Folkestone and Hythe. Work was currently underway in Dover, Deal and Paddock Wood.

(4) During discussion of this item it was agreed to invite the Environment Agency to the next meeting in order for the Committee to ascertain how their work on coastal and fluvial flooding complemented KCC's work. It was considered that this would also assist the public to have a clear overall picture.

(5) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

13. New responsibilities for Flood Management

(Item 7)

(1) Mr Tant reported that further responsibilities of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 had commenced in April 2011.

(2) Mr Tant reported that the County Council had a duty to maintain a register of features and structures that had a significant role in flooding. Work on a pilot scheme had already commenced in East Kent.

(3) The County Council now had a duty to investigate flooding incidents. This was required whenever the Council considered it to be appropriate and where no other authority was undertaking an investigation.

(4) The Committee noted a letter from the Chairman of the transitional Southern Regional Flood and Coastal Committee setting out this new Committee's role in guiding the Environment Agency's flood and coastal erosion risk management activities in the region. These would include raising a levy for local schemes, approving the Environment Agency's regional programme and assisting lead Local Flood Authorities in developing their local strategies.

(5) RESOLVED that the report be noted.

14. Kent Members' Flood Management Training

(Item 8)

(1) Mr Tant reported that the District Councils had not appointed a representative to the Committee because of the uncertainty surrounding the local government elections.

(2) The Committee agreed that a seminar should be arranged in the autumn to inform Members of flood risk developments, including the County Council's broadened role. Representatives from the District Councils and from the Kent Association of Local Councils would be invited to attend. It was considered that, if possible, this should be held in late September with the next Committee taking place in October.

(3) RESOLVED that a seminar be arranged in the early autumn, which all Members of the Council will be invited to attend, together with representatives from the District Councils and Kent Association of Local Councils.

15. Property Level Flood Protection

(Item 9)

(1) Mr Tant informed the Committee that the Environment Agency had made £2 million available for property level flood protection in 2011/12. A grant of £112.5k from this pot had been provided for the defence of 30 basement properties in Dover. Dover District Council would be the lead authority for this project.