

To: Kent Flood Risk Management Committee – 18 November 2013

From: Michael Hill, Cabinet Member, Customer and Communities
Stuart Beaumont, Head of Community Safety and Emergency Planning

Subject: Environment Agency Flood Alerts and Warnings and KCC flood response activity since the last meeting.

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: To update Kent Flood Risk Management Committee on Environment Agency Flood Alerts and Warnings and KCC flood response activity since the last meeting of the Committee on 22nd July 2013. Members are requested to note this report.

1. Background

1.1 KCC Emergency Planning and the Call Centre receive Environment Agency Flood Alerts and Warnings by e-mail and fax on a 24 hour 7 days a week basis. Impacts upon communities, infra-structure and the wider environment are assessed and a response mobilised as required.

1.2 Some 70,000 properties in Kent are located within areas at risk of fluvial or tidal flooding. Where practically and hydrologically possible, these properties are offered a Flood Warning Service by the Environment Agency. However, other parts of the county are also potentially vulnerable to surface or ground water flooding. Early warning of flood risk to communities (including areas outside of floodplains) is delivered through Flood Guidance Statements, Severe Weather Warnings and Severe Weather Advisory Group.

1.3 Environment Agency Flood Alerts are issued earlier than a Flood Warning, to provide advance notice of the possibility of flooding. Rivers levels will be high, and flooding of low lying land and roads is possible. Tidal Flood Alerts will correspond with high tides, and/or significant waves, with some spray overtopping and flooding of low lying land and roads possible. Property flooding is not expected, but the Alert does serve as an early warning, and may precede Flood Warnings. The Flood Alert is issued in order that the public, the emergency services, local authorities and other bodies are aware of an increasing chance of flooding and take appropriate preparatory action.

1.4 Flood Warnings are used to warn that flooding of property is expected and that immediate action should be taken to protect life and property. They are issued when flooding of homes and businesses is expected. The Environment Agency aim to issue Flood Warnings at least two hours before the onset of property flooding.

1.5 Severe Flood Warnings are issued to warn of significant risk to life or disruption to the community from widespread or prolonged flooding. Property

owners, the public at risk, the emergency services, and local authorities should act to protect life and property. This is likely to involve an enhanced response and the commitment of significant resource, in terms of personnel, assets and expenditure. Wherever possible, the decision to issue a Severe Flood Warning will be taken in conjunction with multi-agency partners.

2. Latest situation

2.1 Since the last meeting of the Kent Flood Risk Management Committee on 22nd July 2013 18 Flood Alerts have been received, covering the River Eden and Eden Brook (x3), Upper River Stour (x2), River Darent catchment (x3) and Plenty, Swalecliffe and West Brooks (x2), Upper River Medway (x1), Lower River Medway (1) River Bourne (x2), Rivers on the Isle of Sheppey (x1), River Rother (2) New Romney Sewer Arm (x1). In addition, 7 Coastal Flood Alerts have been received, covering the coast from Fairlight to Dungeness (1), Sandgate to Dungeness (1), Pegwell Bay to Deal (2), Seasalter to Margate (1), Tidal Medway, Swale and Coastal Isle of Sheppey (1), and Dartford to Allhallows (1). No Flood Warnings have been issued.

2.2 In addition 10 Severe Weather Warnings (9 for heavy rain and 1 for high winds) covering Kent have been issued by the Met Office, and 7 surface water flooding events have been reported to the KCC Emergency Planning Duty Officer for action.

2.3 Further, the risk of an East Coast tidal surge impacting Kent on 10th October triggered a heightened state of readiness and multi-agency liaison. Four test closures of the Thames Barrier have also taken place since the last meeting.

2.4 The St. Jude's day storm on 28th October, and subsequent rainfall through the start of November have brought heightened risks of tidal and fluvial flooding. Ground conditions are now quite wet, meaning that river levels are expected to rise more rapidly and significantly in response to further rainfall. Tidal defences, and shingle beaches in particular, have been affected by recent stormy conditions, and the Environment Agency and local authorities are working to repair these.

3. Next Steps

3.1 The autumn and winter period has historically seen an increased risk of flooding within Kent, and the wet autumn (with long range weather forecasts indicating the weather will remain unsettled), suggests that a high level of vigilance needs to be maintained by the local resilience community and residents.

3.2 Members will continue to be regularly updated on flood alerts and response in Kent.

4. Recommendations

4.1 That Members:

- Note the level of alerts received since the last meeting of the Kent Flood Risk Management Committee;

- Note the need for sustained vigilance in light of recent rainfall and forecast unsettled weather conditions; and
- Contribute any additional matters arising from debate by the Committee.

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Background documents: None