

To: Kent Flood Risk Management Committee – 21 July 2014

From: Michael Harrison, Chairman of Kent Flood Risk Management Committee

Subject: Report Back from Scrutiny Committee.

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: To update the Committee on the overview report to the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 12 June 2014.

1. Background

1.1 The Kent Flood Risk Management Committee, as part of the Scrutiny Suite is required to submit an annual report to the Scrutiny Committee.

1.2 I attended the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 12 June 2014, accompanied by the Flood Risk Manager, Max Tant and the Senior Resilience Officer, Tony Harwood. Andrew Tait from Democratic Services was also present as the Clerk to the Committee. The report to the Scrutiny Committee is enclosed at **Appendix 1** without including the Terms of Reference and the Minutes of the previous meetings).

2. Discussions.

2.1 I introduced the report by explaining that over the previous year the Committee (KFRMC) had carried out its scrutiny function with diligence and enthusiasm. Its Members had participated fully and their views, as set out in the Committee Minutes, were conveyed to the relevant agencies for their information. All 12 of the Kent Districts as well as the IDBs were invited to attend the KFRMC meetings and to participate fully in its activities.

2.2 Tony Harwood reported that the KFRMC took its oversight duties very seriously. It had arranged an informal meeting on 15 January 2014 to receive key agency updates and to capture any major issues whilst they were still fresh in the mind. He went into detail about KCC's emergency response activities during the Autumn/Winter 2013/14 period which had not only dealt with the impact of flooding, but also with the significant storm damage, including disruption to transport systems and the loss of utilities to tens of thousands of households. He added that a further report addressing the winter floods was due to be submitted to Corporate Board on 23 June and to Cabinet on 7 July. This report, including its outcomes would also be submitted to KFRMC in its scrutiny role.

2.3 Members of the Scrutiny Committee raised a number of matters during the discussion. For example, that there had been no overall authority on the ground in Sevenoaks West and that there was a need for the Authority to be able to co-ordinate the next steps in the recovery process following the flooding.

2.4 I stressed that KFRMC's role was one of scrutiny and oversight rather than operational control. I added that KFRMC was, nevertheless, gaining increased

powers of persuasion. Issues such as the protection of livestock and pets (which suffered greatly during the flooding period), long-term maintenance and management of watercourse and flood-plains, the capacity of surface water drainage pipes were being addressed in this way.

2.5 An example of the ability of KFRMC to respond to local concerns had occurred as a result of the presentation given to the Committee by the Little Stour and Nailbourne Management Group on 11 March. Following that meeting, I was invited to undertake a trip up the River Great Stour to observe the lack of maintenance on that river, which was locally perceived as the cause of slow flows, producing a greater likelihood of tide-locking and surface water events in surrounding areas. As a result, I was able to underline to the Environment Agency the view of many Members of the KFRMC that some de-silting would allow the local catchments to drain more efficiently.

2.6. The Scrutiny Committee also focussed on Mr Baker's comments at KFRMC's last meeting in respect of Dutch Flood Defences. I was asked whether KFRMC had received an update on the discussions between the Environment Agency and representatives from Holland. Whilst I would not expect KFRMC to necessarily receive a report back on this matter between meetings, I consider that the fact that this question was asked gives a very clear indication of the level of interest in the area of work that our Committee is involved in. In any event, I and my two KCC colleagues on the Environment Agency's Regional Flood Defence Committee will be taking this matter up at that particular forum.

3. Conclusions

3.1 A number of Scrutiny Committee Members praised the work of the Kent Flood Risk Management Committee, and also suggested areas for additional scrutiny. This included inviting a representative from Kent Highways Services to report on drainage improvement work. I was delighted to agree to this and was also able to say that a report on this matter had already been requested by the KFRMC Members.

3.2. The Scrutiny Committee thanked us for the report and said it was looking forward to the next report in a year's time.

4. Recommendations

4.1 The Committee is invited to note the report and the assurance that it is carrying out its work to the Scrutiny Committee's satisfaction.

Mike Harrison, Chairman of the Kent Flood Risk Management Committee
01622 694215 / mike.harrison@kent.gov.uk

Contact Officer: Andrew Tait, Democratic Services 01622 694342/
andrew.tait@kent.gov.uk

Background documents: None