

From: **Mike Harrison, Chairman of the Kent Flood Risk Management Committee**

To: **Scrutiny Committee – 11 June 2015**

Subject: **The work of the Kent Flood Risk Management Committee**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary: This report provides the Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the work of the Kent Flood Risk Management for the period May 2014 to March 2015.

Recommendation(s): The Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the contents of the report.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Kent Flood Risk Management Committee last reported to this Committee on 12 June 2014 when it was agreed that there should be an annual report back. The Committee has met on three occasions during the intervening year.
- 1.2 The Committee's Terms of Reference are set out at **Appendix 1** to this report. The membership of the Committee consists of 8 Members of the County Council. There is also a standing invitation to each of the District Councils, the Internal Drainage Boards in Kent, Kent Fire and Rescue Service and KALC to send representatives to the meetings. All these representatives are treated as though they are full Committee Members except for the formal items of business.
- 1.3 Officer support to the Committee is provided by Tony Harwood (Resilience and Emergencies Manager) and Max Tant (Flood Risk Manager). Senior Officers from the Environment Agency also report and contribute to the meetings.
- 1.4 The Committee Members' minds were very focused on the 2013/14 major flooding events. The response to this and the lessons learned gave our meetings a greater sense of urgency, particularly during the Autumn 2014 period which saw heavy rainfall and the likelihood that recommendations arising out of post-incident debriefs by KCC and partners would be tested during a further episode of severe weather. The Minutes of the Committee's three meetings are set out at **Appendix 2**. These are very detailed. I summarise the main areas of activity from each of the Committee's events.
- 1.5 Each meeting received a standing report entitled "*Environment Agency and Met Office Alerts and Warnings and KCC flood response activities since the last meeting.*" Max Tant also reported regularly on what everyone expected would become KCC's role in approving and adopting SuDS schemes. The Scrutiny Committee will be aware that this is now not expected to materialise in the form that was originally envisaged.

2. Committee meeting of 21 July 2014.

- 2.1 The meeting was preceded by a visit to the Leigh Barrier, which enabled Members to see a key component of Kent's Flood Management strategy at first hand.
- 2.2 The Committee received a report on the Cabinet's response to the Storms and Floods, noted the recommendations and agreed that it would consider progress against the targets set at future meetings. It then discussed a presentation from the Drainage Manager, Katie Lewis on highway drainage infrastructure repairs, renewals and improvements. It was concluded that the current level of investment needed to be maintained and potentially increased in the future.

3. Committee meeting on 17 November 2014

- 3.1 The meeting was held in The Guildhall in Sandwich. Members visited the Sandwich Flood Defences in the morning, accompanied by KCC and Environment Agency Officers.
- 3.2 The main item of business was a presentation by Mr Paul Kent from Southern Water on its response to the previous winter's floods. This was a very detailed presentation. The Committee Members carefully questioned Mr Kent on both Southern Water's broad strategy and raised individual local matters of concern. The Committee had specifically asked that Southern Water be invited and was pleased to receive a full and frank response to all issues raised.
- 3.3 Mr Paul Crick presented a Winter 2013/14 Storms and Floods progress report which stressed the efforts being made to enhance the inter-agency (and inter-Directorate) resilience in preparation for all eventualities during the coming winter.
- 3.4 It was during this meeting that the Committee was warned that a smaller storm event than had occurred in the previous winter would lead to the same level of emergency in 2014/15 as a consequence of prevailing groundwater levels.
- 3.5 Members of this Committee will recall that during discussion of last year's report, I raised my concerns over the effect of flooding on the fate of livestock and other animals. It was a personal pleasure that the Committee received a report on the work being undertaken to deliver Kent and Medway *Animal Evacuation and Shelter Plan*. This document has now been nominated for an RSPCA award.

4. Committee meeting on 10 March 2015.

- 4.1 The report on the Winter 2014/15 Flood Alerts and Warnings detailed the greatly reduced number of incidents in comparison with the previous year as well as enhancements to community resilience and partners' inventory of flood response assets and equipment - which had enabled an improved response to those flooding events which had occurred. The Committee was also made aware that there were still lessons which needed to be learned, and that these were being progressed through the Kent Resilience Forum Pan Kent Flood Group (which is chaired by the environment Agency with KCC holding the vice chair role).
- 4.2 Max Tant reported on the latest round of consultations by Defra and the DCLG on SuDS provision. The Minutes of this particular item set out that the Committee was not best pleased with developments. Broad support was given to KCC's response. An invitation has been extended to the LGA (which is negotiating with DCLG on behalf of local authorities) to speak to the Committee on the new Burdens Assessment.
- 4.3 This meeting also considered reports on the Kent Resilience Forum Pan-Kent Flood Group, Flood Risk Mitigation in Faversham and the CPRE Flood Conference.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 Kent Flood Risk Management Committee has carried out an important oversight and scrutiny function in terms of scrutinising the work carried out by KCC and its partner agencies. Its Members have raised issues which have been gratefully followed up by the organisations which have reported to u, notably including works to the River Stour and

evacuation and shelter for livestock and other animals. The Committee's influence has been increased by the positive engagement by those local authorities who regularly attend and by the positions of authority that their representatives hold within their organisations.

5.2 There are, however, some local authorities who do not send representatives to the Committee's meetings. I intend to encourage them to do so in future because they will find the community leadership, experience and networking opportunities in this important area of activity very worthwhile. I also believe that if we can maximise attendance, this will reap greater rewards for the County as a whole in terms of influence, understanding and joined-up working to mitigate the risks arising from all forms of flooding in Kent.

6. Recommendation

6.1 The Committee is invited to note the content of this report

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