

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

To: **Scrutiny Committee – 9 June 2016**

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 2015 to March 2016.

**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 11 June 2015. The Committee asked that in future years the reports would provide greater detail of the year's events instead of enclosing the Minutes as Appendices. This report has therefore been prepared in the light of this request.
- 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 In 2015/16, the Committee continued to monitor responses to Environment Agency and Met Office Alerts and Warnings and KCC flood response activities, receiving a standing report at each meeting throughout the year. The most significant flooding event during the last year occurred in January 2016 when some 120 residential properties within the Dover and Shepway Districts were either flooded or required active interventions to prevent their inundation by surface water.
- 1.5 The Committee was able to consider a broader range of topics at its three meetings than it had been able to do in 2014/15 when the focus had overwhelmingly been on the winter 2013/14 wide-area flooding events.

## **2. Committee meeting of 20 July 2015.**

- 2.1 The Committee received a presentation from Paul Cobbing, Chief Executive of the National Flood Forum (NFF). This is a national charity which runs dozens of projects throughout the UK and has some 200 community groups affiliated to it. It builds upon the strong relationships it has built up with DEFRA and the Environment Agency to carry out its three functions, which are:
  - Helping people prepare for flooding;
  - Helping people recover their lives after flooding; and
  - Campaigning and working to put flood risk communities at the centre of policy making and operational delivery.

- 2.2 Mr Cobbing told the Committee that the NFF has a special role to play because everyone accepts their independence from official agencies. This enables them to engage with people who are angry and upset in a way which statutory agencies are unable to do.
- 2.3 The NFF's highest priority is "Citizen Control." It considers it essential that every community that is affected by or at risk of flooding is empowered to take the lead.
- 2.4 The NFF also has a major role to play in the aftermath of flood events. It has learned through experience that communities' needs are very different a week after a flooding event than during the first three or four days. Insurance is often the most significant priority at this time. The NFF is able to use the strong links it has established with the insurance industry to help overcome difficulties. This is also true for emergency alternative accommodation issues, because of the NFF's links with housing providers.
- 2.5 Another aspect of the NFF's work is preparation for flooding. If a community has no local flood group, the NFF will help set one up, advising on the best way to organise. On occasions, they will facilitate discussions within a community in order to resolve disagreements over what the actual flooding issues are.
- 2.6 The Committee was pleased to note that the NFF was currently in discussions with the Kent Resilience Forum over joint working.
- 2.7 The Committee also received a report from Max Tant on the preparation of "Flood Risk to Communities" documents. He provided a copy of the draft covering the Canterbury City Council administrative area (the first to have reached this stage of readiness) and explained that the Flood Risk Management Strategy would be assisted by supplementary documents at District level which covered all forms of flood risk including areas covered by the Environment Agency, KCC, the sewerage undertakers and the Highways Authority. The documents would also identify lines of responsibility during emergencies and any local flood plans produced to manage risk. They would aim to provide an overview of all local flooding issues and signpost where more detailed information could be obtained.
- 2.8 The Committee commented on the draft Canterbury City Council document and was very pleased to note that it was intended to include reference to Flood Wardens including guidance on their role and value.

### **3. Committee meeting on 16 November 2015**

- 3.1 The Committee set aside a large proportion of its time for a number of presentations from people who were working in emergency response at a voluntary and local level. Tim Norton, Environment Agency Flood Resilience Team Leader gave the first presentation entitled "Community Resilience in Kent: Flood Wardens." He said that the flooding events of winter 2013/14 had convinced the Environment Agency that identifying and training Flood Wardens was a key priority. A great deal of effort had been put into recruiting and training Flood Wardens, supplemented by the production of the *Flood Warden Handbook*.
- 3.2 Tim Norton told the Committee that there had been a rapid response to the need for action in support of communities and volunteers. There was also a mutual understanding amongst the various partners who were developing Flood Warden training; sufficient funding had been secured for the purchase of basic equipment; Flood Wardens were integrated into the long term strategy for building resilient communities; and nearly 200 Flood Wardens had been through initial training.

- 3.3 There was a risk that the number of Flood Wardens would decline if no local flooding occurred for a number of years. The Environment Agency was therefore arranging seminars and other events in order to maintain momentum and knowledge. Another matter that needed to be addressed was that the Environment Agency did not have the resources to enable it to work with every single community where a Flood Warden had been trained. It was therefore going to be a necessary to prioritise and to consider the level of support that should be given on a case by case basis. Some higher risk communities still did not have any flood wardens and consideration would need to be given to the best way to work with them in those circumstances. It was also very important that the Districts and Boroughs carried out exercises to ensure that they were aware of all the Flood Wardens in their areas and that they knew how to contact them whenever the need arose.
- 3.4 The Committee was then briefly addressed by Carl Lewis, a Tonbridge Flood Warden and one of the two Area Flood Warden Co-ordinators. He described the efforts that had been made to recruit new Wardens after 2013/14 which included newspaper advertisements and contributions from the local MP. He stressed the importance of communication which could vary in form from door knocking to emails and Environment Agency roadshows. The message needed to be conveyed to the community that a Flood Warden's role was not limited to emergency events, but that they were there to provide support to their communities throughout the entire year.
- 3.5 Presentations were also given by Stuart Kenny from Kent Search and Rescue and by Steve Short of South East 4x4 Response. These two voluntary organisations had both contributed massively and in a number of ways during the winter 2013/14 flood events and had built on the excellent liaison arrangements they had already developed with Kent Police and other organisations.
- 3.6 The Committee was very impressed with the enthusiasm and commitment displayed by all four speakers. There was also a strong view that the Committee should play its part in communicating more widely the value of their work. Our next meeting in July 2016 will take place in Yalding and we hope to see as many Flood Wardens there as possible in order that we can express our gratitude for all that they do and demonstrate our belief in the critically important contribution that they make to flood resilience and response in Kent.
- 3.7 The Committee also received a detailed oral report from Paul Flaherty from Kent Fire and Rescue on the second Kent Resilience Forum Annual Severe Weather Exercise. This had been very worthwhile and had demonstrated the preparedness of all the agencies concerned, including Kent County Council. I suggested that an invitation should be sent to the Committee whenever an event of this nature took place.
- 3.8 The Committee was delighted to be told that a prestigious national award had been presented to the Kent Voluntary Sector Emergency Group by the Emergency Planning Society in recognition of the tremendous role played by volunteers in Kent and the service that they were providing.

#### **4. Committee meeting on 8 March 2016.**

- 4.1 Katie Moreton from Kent Highways and Waste gave a presentation to the Committee on Highways Flooding Events and Drainage Issues. She explained that due to the below average rainfall in winter 2015/16 the number of customer enquiries and drainage emergencies had been considerably lower than in previous years.

- 4.2 Katie Moreton detailed the cyclical cleansing of gullies and targeted activity undertaken during the year. All drains on main roads are cleansed on a cyclical basis every twelve months. A service-wide programme is undertaken on high speed roads, which means that soft landscaping, pot hole fixing, barrier tensioning and street lighting teams carry out their maintenance work together overnight. The same approach used to be taken in respect of minor roads. This approach changed in April 2014 as a result of feedback from the public. Highways Stewards now carry out an inspection and assessment whenever an enquiry is received. This includes identification of any work that needs to be carried out in the vicinity. Depending on the seriousness of the concern, work can begin at any time between 2 hours and 90 days of the enquiry coming in.
- 4.3 Another vital area of Kent Highways' work is carried out on "Drainage Hotspots" which Katie Moreton defined as "a flood prone section of the highway network." These are areas where flooding occurs because the drains are frequently blocked. If a drainage system is seen as defective, it will not be focussed upon because repeated cleansing would not solve the problem. Instead, prioritisation is done twice a year by analysing all the reports of flooding and those areas where Highways have attended emergencies. Presently, there are 114 Drainage Hotspots identified in Kent which are attended to every six months. This list is sense checked by the Area Drainage Engineer and the District Manager. The list is not *automatically* added to on the request of locally elected representatives or Parish Councils due to the need to avoid it becoming completely unmanageable.
- 4.4 All the Highways Asset Managers made their bids for capital for their highway improvements budgets in December 2015. The initial Drainage bid was £11.65m comprising 144 large schemes and 1,000 small reactive improvement works. The final agreed budget was £3.625m which Katie Moreton estimates will enable 66 large schemes and some 200 small reactive improvement works to be carried out. This compares with a far lower budget in 2015/16 of £1.65m when only smaller works were carried out.
- 4.5 Max Tant then provided an update report on the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy. He set out the challenges for flood risk management in Kent. These are:-
- Delivering local flood risk management works;
  - Joint delivery of schemes;
  - Combined sewer networks;
  - Promotion of natural flood management techniques;
  - Developing KCC's role as a consultee for some minor developments in high risk areas;
  - SuDS adoption and maintenance;
  - Improving community resilience;
  - Proper planning for local flood risk emergencies; and
  - Understanding the full economic benefits of flood risk management.
- 4.6 One action that arose out of the discussion of Max Tant's report was that I was asked to write to Kent MPs on the Committee's behalf setting out its view that the Government should develop a legislative framework for SuDS.

## **5 Future activities**

- 5.1 The next meeting of the Committee will be held in July 2016 in Yalding. It is very important that the Committee is seen to be active all around the County. It is even more important that we give a practical demonstration to local communities, flood wardens and other volunteers that we are their committee and that they should feel confident about bringing plaudits and concerns to us. At this meeting, we will also have an update from Southern Water on their investment plans.

5.2 It is in the same spirit that we are considering whether the Committee would benefit from additional representation from KALC. A report on this matter will be considered at the July meeting.

## **6. Conclusions**

6.1 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. The Committee's influence has benefited from the continued positive engagement by those local authorities who regularly attend and by the positions of authority that their representatives hold within those organisations.

6.2 There are, however, some local authorities who despite a standing invitation do not send representatives to the Committee's meetings. As Chairman, I intend to use the opportunity provided by the recent Local Government elections to remind each of the Districts and Boroughs to notify us of any change to its membership of the Committee whilst encouraging those authorities who are currently not represented to take up the Committee's invitation. The greater the number of authorities who attend, the greater will be the reward 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.

## **7. Recommendation**

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