

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

KENT FLOOD RISK AND WATER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Kent Flood Risk and Water Management Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 5 February 2025.

PRESENT: Mr A R Hills (Chairman), Mr D L Brazier, Mr D Crow-Brown, Ms M Dawkins, Mr M A J Hood, Mrs M McArthur and Mr P Bartlett

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms P Haselhurst (Lower Medway Internal Drainage Board), Ms L Faulkner (The Environment Agency), Mr A Jeffery (Head of Resilience and Emergency Planning), Mr M Rodgers (Met Office Advisor) and Ms E Kennedy (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Apologies
(Item 1)

Apologies had been received from Mr Cole for whom Mr Bartlett was present as substitute.

2. Declarations of Interest
(Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the meeting on 20 November 2024
(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2024 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

4. The Role of Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs)
(Item 4)

Priscilla Haselhurst, Lower Medway Internal Drainage Board, was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Haselhurst presented on the role of internal drainage boards.
2. In response to comments and questions from guests and Members it was said:

- a. A Member questioned whether the service was working with the water boards or any other companies, also whether there was flexibility in the government funding. Additionally, questioning whether water structure management was embedded into developer policy. Ms Haselhurst shared that the service sat on the Water Resources South East, a collaboration with water companies, which looked at funding opportunities and sharing data. There was funding to start collecting data, which was a priority for the service. Ms Haselhurst assured Members that the water structure management was embedded.
- b. When questioned to what extent the service was governed by legislation and what level of legislation changes would be needed. Ms Haselhurst explained that the Land Drainage Act was the main piece of legislation, the substantive work of collecting and analysing data regarding different ways to manage water would not require legislative change however some work would require legislative changes.
- c. A Member questioned whether internal drainage boards were statutory consultee for planning. How the service envisaged the process coming together. Ms Haselhurst explained that internal drainage boards were not a statutory consultee. It was agreed that the water service was fragmented, the service was moving towards a catchment-based approach to help sort issues.
- d. When asked what the solution to the issues present. Ms Haselhurst said funding was not the complete issue, the solution would be connecting data, there was thought to using AI to aid with this in the future.
- e. A Member questioned the involvement in internal drainage boards in ongoing discussion of water quality in Ashford. Ms Haselhurst shared that it came back to data, planning to collect high level water quality data to improve water quality across the county, confirming that this data collected would include nitrates and phosphates.
- f. When asked about communication with the Internal Drainage Boards. Ms Haselhurst explained that the transparency of Internal Drainage Boards had improved. The boards did not have the legal authority or expertise to deal with contamination, under the Land Drainage Act there were permissive powers which allowed them to do maintenance, individuals were able to contact the service with specific issues.
- g. A Member questioned if there was a map that detailed internal drainage boards. Ms Haselhurst explained that there was but the service was in the process of improving its website.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the content of the presentation.

5. Environment Agency and Met Office Alerts and Warnings and KCC severe weather response activity
(Item 7)

Andy Jeffery, Head of Resilience and Emergency Planning, was in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Jeffery outlined the report.
2. In response to comments and questions from guests and Members it was said:
 - a. A Member questioned water treatment works causing power outages, requesting South East Water attend the Committee to answer for the delays in the communication of issues to residents. Mr Jeffery explained that work was being done with South East Water and other services to understand the causes of water treatment works causing power outages and whether there were any recurring issues to be addressed. Within the Kent and Medway Resilience Forum there was a Water Supply Disruption Plan and there was ongoing work with suppliers to ensure the protocol was followed.
 - b. Members agreed that South East Water should attend the Committee in the future.
3. RESOLVED that the Committee note the warnings received since the last meeting of the Committee.

6. How the Environment Agency manage Water Quality
(Item 5)

Lindsay Faulkner, Environment Agency, was in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Faulkner presented on Kent flood risk resilience.
2. In response to comments and questions from guests and Members it was said:
 - a. The Chair thanked Ms Faulkner for her presentation and invited her to return to the Committee.
 - b. When asked to keep pressure up on Southern Water to ensure services were delivered. Ms Faulkner shared that there were a significant number of enforcement investigations ongoing. The Government had given the organisation an uplift in funding to increase the regulation and enforcement of water companies.
 - c. A Member questioned the impact of a lack of funding on the delivery of results by the service. Ms Faulkner explained that funding had not changed and that the treasury rules controlled the spending of funds. Ms Faulkner added that the organisation had a marine team who covered a large remit of bathing beaches. Resources were spread thinly, there was hope for additional funding following a review of the regulations.
 - d. A Member questioned whether there was guidance to give to residents on what should and should be flushed down the toilet and the link between littering and water quality. Ms Faulkner explained that the partnership with Folkstone and Hythe on communication allowed the service to develop clear communications that could be provided to

residents, this was to be sent to Members to distribute to their communities.

- e. A Member questioned whether the SWIMFO website could become more public facing and have more data available. Additionally, asking how bathing waters uses were measured. Ms Faulkner was to come back to the Committee with the information and was to feedback the need for further usability and accessibility of the SWIMFO website.
- f. A Member questioned whether there were any place on the River Medway where wild swimming was be recommended. Additionally, asking whether there were opportunities for citizen testing in the River Medway and where could results be fed back to. Furthermore, questioning where the pollution issue in Deal originated from. Ms Faulkner shared that there were surface water outfalls in Deal which the service were working to identify. Additionally, the service were researching the continuity of ground water with bathing water, adding that in an urban area, the issue would usually be localised to the bathing water location. There was a specific employee who coordinated citizen science work, Ms Faulkner was to share his contact details with Members.
- g. When asked why only certain areas were considered bathing water. Ms Faulkner explained that communities and local councils applied for this status, it was not the Environmental Agency that assigned this to areas. Ms Faulkner shared that in terms of testing water quality, funding was an issue, which was set to the statutory obligations of the service.
- h. A Member noted that Kent were good compared to European Standards, requesting that Members be sent this guidance. Additionally, asking how far the service tests the long shore drift, noting the importance of the accuracy of the results. Furthermore, questioning what classified bathing water as a risk to health. Ms Faulkner explained that the set standard for a risk to health was when a water sample entered into the 'poor' classification. Ms Faulkner offered to bring a marine scientist colleague to the Committee at a future date to advise further on the algorithm for water quality.

3. RESOLVED that the Committee note the content of the presentation.

7. Met Office presentation on Climate Change (Item 6)

Mark Rogers, Met Office Advisor, was in attendance for this item.

- 1. Mr Rogers presented on climate change.
- 2. In response to comments and questions from guests and Members it was said:
 - a. Mr Rogers invited Members to attend Met Offices courses on climate change.

- b. A Member noted the risk of rising levels in sea temperatures. Mr Rodgers shared that a vast amount of CO₂ was absorbed by the ocean, which in turn caused increased sea levels.
 - c. A Member questioned whether Kent Flood Wardens were able to attend the training. Mr Rogers encouraged anyone to sign up for training and was to provide prospectuses that would be sent to Members.
 - d. The Chair thanked Mr Rogers for his presentation.
3. RESOLVED that the Committee note the content of the presentation.