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, 4 March 2026.

PRESENT: Mr W Chapman (Chair), Mr J Baker, Mr J Finch, Mr S Heaver, Mr M Paul, Mr M Munday (substitute) and Vacancy

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M A J Hood, Cllr Summersgill (Maidstone Borough Council), Charles Mackonochie (KALC), Cllr D Kent (Tonbridge Wells Borough Council) and Cllr T Hills (Folkestone & Hythe Borough Council)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Richard Penn (Environment Planning and Engagement Manager Environment Agency), Mr Simon Curd (Flood Risk management Team Environment Agency), Mrs Helen Piele (Southern Gas Networks), Mark Rogers (Met Office) Mr Andy Jeffery (Head of Resilience and Emergency Planning) and James Willis (Democratic Service Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

14. Apologies
(Item 1)

Apologies were received from Mr M Sole who was substituted by Mr M Munday. Cllr Gale (Dartford Borough Council) also sent apologies.

15. Declarations of Interest
(Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

16. Minutes of the meeting on 29.10.2025
(Item 3)

A Member noted that several actions were missing from the previous minutes. The Clerk acknowledged the concern and explained that the actions had been, or were currently being, followed up outside the meeting. An update would be provided to Members in due course.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2025 were an accurate record and that they be signed by the Chair.

17. KCC Severe Weather Response Activity Report
(Item 4)

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

1. The officer present outlined some notable aspects which included:

    a) The Council's response activities for the previous quarter. The officer discussed the commencement of the short, focused inquiry (SFI) that would address the recent water outages that had impacted Tunbridge Wells and surrounding areas. The inquiry had held its first meeting the previous day (03/10) and would gather evidence throughout March, with a final report due to be presented at the Scrutiny Committee in May.

    b) It was acknowledged that the severe water outages that had been experienced in Kent during January had occurred outside of the current reporting period but would be included in the next quarterly update.

RESOLVED to note the verbal update on KCC Severe Weather Response Activity Report

18. Met Office- Introduction Presentation
(Item 5)

Mark Rogers (Met Office Advisor for Civil Contingencies) was in attendance for this item.

1.Mr Rogers presented the following:

a) Mr Rogers explained the purpose, structure and statutory role of the National Meteorological Service, including its function as a Category 2 responder under civil contingency legislation. He provided detailed information on the public weather service, data services, and the national severe weather warning system.

b) Outlined how impact-based weather warnings were issued, how risk was assessed, and how these warnings triggered local resilience arrangements. He also briefed Members on forecast accuracy, the national supercomputer capability, Met Office app with personalised forecasts and weather warnings and the storm-naming system.

c) Presented a review of the previous year's weather patterns, including the unusually dry spring and summer conditions followed by a notably wet autumn and winter. He described longer-term climate trends and introduced the Local Authority Climate Service (LACS), which provided accessible climate projection reports for each local area.

d) Highlighted that the three-month outlook had suggested a warmer than average upcoming spring.

e) Concluded the presentation by highlighting the available responder training programmes that covered topics such as meteorology, flood risk, space weather, climate change, and other related hazards.

2.A number of questions raised by Members included:

a) Queried the accessibility to members of local climate projections. Mr Rogers reemphasised that the LAC service was publicly accessible online and provided access to tailored reports for Kent.

b) Members asked how projected rainfall changes aligned with flood-modelling updates. In response it was explained that climate projections models used nationally were aligned between agencies and had provided a comprehensive picture.

c) Questions on the impact of earthquakes on the coastal communities of Kent and the availability of data to review impacts were queried. It was discussed that any earthquake analysis was led by the British Geological Survey (BGS) with collated data being shared through the Natural Hazard's Partnership. (HNP)

d) Members questioned what mechanisms were available to monitor sea temperatures and the associated impacts on coastal communities. In response it was discussed that sea temperatures were monitored through satellite systems and buoy networks and had indicated that a rising trend was contributing to a sea-level increase and impacted a quantifiable ecological change.

e) Further questions were raised on the projected scale of sea-level rise and its local implications. Mr Rogers discussed that climate projections had indicated significant long-term sea-level rises in Southern England, with an increased coastal flood risk being a notable concern.

RESOLVED to note the Met Office Presentation

19. Environment Agency-Collaborative Works with Kent County Council
(Item 6)

Richard Penn (Deputy Director for Kent and South London) and Simon Curd (Area Flood and Coastal Risk Manager)

1) The Environment Agency officers present discussed various aspects of the joint works, including the following:

a) Mr Penn outlined the strategic framework guiding the agency's work, including the national plan for a climate-resilient environment. He described collaboration that had occurred via the Kent and Medway Resilience Forum.

This had encompassed updates to the multi-agency flood plan, the integration of drought planning within severe weather plans also incorporated and improved community-level resilience being of note.

b) Mr Curd described the significance of the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCCs) on approving capital investment programmes. The officer presented an overview of current and upcoming flood-risk projects across Kent, including major embankment works, beach-management schemes and property-level protection schemes.

c) Officers explained that new national funding rules, effective from April 2026, would allow the first £3 million of any project to be fully grant-funded, with only 10% required thereafter. This would allow more schemes to progress and included projects that had delivered natural flood-management measures or sustainable drainage.

d) Summarised recent weather conditions, noting exceptionally high rainfall over the Winter which had raised groundwater levels and had in turn had heavily impacted winterbournes (stream fed chalk aquifers) which in turn had required a multi-agency operational response.

2) Members made a number of questions in regard to the presentation:

a) Local flood issues that had impacted the Paddock Wood area were raised by Members. Presenting officers responded that works were ongoing with local representatives to address issues in Paddock Wood.

b) Issues were flagged on the specific responses received on the subject of the bathing water quality of Deal and Walmer. The Environment Agency officers acknowledged the concerns the Member had raised and suggested that a meeting with the Member, and the respective town Councils take place to address the issues.

c) Members queried on what lessons had been learned from the introduction of property-level protection schemes and a greater need for communications with residents. Officers responded that lessons from previous property-level protection schemes were continually reviewed and shared online.

d) The recent Storm Goretti had recently caused significant impacts along the Kent coastline. However, it was indicated by Members that none of the established storm alarms had been triggered. Officers acknowledged the issues and confirmed that the storm had not met the predetermined criteria required to activate the alarms. Further discussions were taking place with hydrological experts in Southampton to understand why the expected alerts had not triggered in the impacted areas. Officers from the Environment Agency would look to update members at a later date.

e) In response to a query on UV treatment, the Environment Agency officers confirmed that this would be fed back through the appropriate channels. It was noted that implementing such an approach would likely require a significant legislative change. The Environment Agency, as an operational body, was not in a position to initiate or advocate for changes to legislation.

Officers suggested that responsibility for progressing such changes would lie elsewhere. Nonetheless, it was acknowledged that UV treatment had the potential to offer significant benefits in the future.

f) Officers explained that a number of natural flood management schemes had previously been implemented, including trial projects in Bedgebury forest and other locations. Although further site names could not be recalled at the meeting, it was confirmed that natural flood management remained an active area of work locally.

g) In response to the question regarding the number of incidents reported and whether they were attended in person, It was advised that the data would need to be taken away and confirmed. It was clarified that the query had related to environmental incidents rather than flood incidents. Officers agreed to confirm if the information could be provided.

h) The Environment Agency had routinely attended water company-related incidents, which were often those with notable impacts and encompassed large areas of disruption. Officers highlighted that the agency had been able to recover its costs for attending such incidents, meaning there was no additional burden to the public purse.

i) Regarding property-level protection for other residents in affected areas, the committee was advised that there would be a need to review available information and the levels of support that may be available and report back to the Committee at a later date.

j) A Member sought advice and feedback on behalf of residents regarding Southern Water's Investment Programme (SWIP) to improve water quality. Reference was made to concerns previously raised in Deal and Walmer, which were reflected equally by residents in Whitstable. It was revealed that Whitstable was considered a priority area by the Environment Agency, with an official target to reduce storm overflows to 10 spills per year by 2030 was already in place.

k) Members acknowledged that Southern Water (Utilities partner) had undertaken a level of engagement with the community, although some residents perceived this as more public relations than meaningful engagement. Despite the concerns discussed, the communication had been welcomed.

l) Concerns were raised regarding recent spill data, including 169 hours of discharge recorded in February 2026 from Swale Cliffe No.1 outfall, located near an oyster fishery and a blue flag beach in a coastal town heavily reliant on its seaside economy. This represented discharges on 50% of days that month.

m) It was discussed that one untreated sewage spill had lasted 28 hours at a rate of approximately 205 litres per second, equating to a substantial total volume discharged. The level of activity appeared inconsistent with the ambition of achieving only 10 spills per year by 2030 and would likely lead to significant public doubt about progress. The Member therefore asked what

supervision, inspection, and oversight the Environment Agency currently provided in relation to Southern Water's programmes in Whitstable and other impacted areas and how councillors and members of the public could access any information on oversights of partner agencies.

n) In response to Members concerns, presenters highlighted that the Environment Agency had increased its inspection activity, with an original target of 10,000 inspections of water company assets between April 2025 and March 2026 and had confirmed that the target was still on track. Compliance inspection reports were now published online, and a link would be provided for circulation to communities

o) Officers also referred to the Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP), noting that the Environment Agency and Ofwat jointly monitor delivery of the five-year investment programme. Failure by water companies to meet milestones may result in financial penalties from Ofwat.

p) In relation to recent sewage spills, officers acknowledged public concern and explained that combined sewer overflows operated during periods of heavy rainfall, with January and February recording significantly above-average rainfall. Further analysis would be carried out to determine whether recent spills were compliant with permit conditions, based on event duration monitoring submitted by water companies. Links to published inspection data would be provided.

q) A Member asked if any accessible system would be available for the public to view inspection dates and compliance information for sewage treatment works, noting that the absence of visible data to date had contributed to public scepticism and low confidence.

r) In response the Committee was advised that the Environment Agency did not publish its forward inspection programme, as doing so could alert water companies to the timing of inspections. However, the published Compliance Assessment Reports provide information on past inspections and encompassed when sites were last visited. Officers discussed that inspection frequency was risk-based, with sites that have a history of non-compliance receiving more frequent inspections than consistently compliant sites. It was added that inspection priorities may also change during the year.

s) Members raised the impact of climate change on coastal communities and natural flood-management opportunities in Kent. Natural flood-management trials had been undertaken in several areas, with further opportunities being assessed.

RESOLVED to note the Environment Agency presentation

20. SGN - Introduction and Water Ingress into the Gas Network Presentation
(Item 7)

Helen Piele (Stakeholder and Community Manager) was in attendance for this item.

1. The officer presented the following:

    a) Explained the circumstances under which water could enter gas infrastructure, including flooding, burst water mains, ground movement and accidental third-party damage. The officer described the operational consequences, which had required isolating the network, removing water, undertaking extensive excavations and reinstatement and completing safety checks before re-connection

    b) Summarised several recent incidents where significant disruption had occurred, including examples where vulnerable residents were affected and where urgent road closures and major engineering work were required.

    c) Mrs Peile noted the importance of coordination with other utilities and local authorities, particularly where highways works were planned near ageing gas infrastructures. The presenter highlighted the national replacement programme for older metal gas mains and the increased relevance of flood-risk mapping in future prioritisation of works.

2. Members asked the following:

    a) Queried how water ingress could occur into pressurised gas pipes. It was noted that water typically entered through breaks caused by damage or joint movement wear over time.

    b) Members asked if incidents involving burst water mains had increased and where liability for the reinstatement of costs would sit. The officer responded that incidents had seen an increase and that repair costs would be recovered from parties responsible for damaging the network.

    c) Discussed if any ground movements had been a contributing to the damaging of aging pipes and infrastructure. It was discussed that ground conditions appeared increasingly to be a major contributor to pipe failures and would likely to continue on this trend.

    d) Clarification of the prioritisation of pipe replacement in flood-prone areas was raised. The presenter would seek clarification on whether flood-risk mapping was currently factored into the replacement-programme prioritisation strategy.

    e) Delays to reinstatement following emergency works. Impacting factors to reinstatement delays could relate to road-material curing times or contractor availability, however communication improvements would be explored to improve the current landscape.

    f) Questions were raised if any damage could occur to household appliances via water ingress. The officer responded that significant water ingress could damage appliances, with compensation being dependent on the circumstances.

g) The Chair asked what the long-term plans for the gas network and future conversion to hydrogen could look like in the future. The officer acknowledged the current inroads made in the development of hydrogen solutions but noted that decisions on the long-term future of the national gas network had not yet been made, although some industrial options were possibly being explored.

RESOLVED to note the Southern Gas Network (SGN) presentation