

From: **Michael Hill, Cabinet Member, Customer and Communities**  
To: **Cabinet**  
Subject: **Christmas / New Year Storms & Floods - Update Report**  
Classification: **Unrestricted**  
Past Pathway of Paper: **Kent Flood Risk Management Committee, Informal Meeting – 15<sup>th</sup> January 2013**  
Future Pathway of Paper: **N/A**  
Electoral Division: **N/A**

**Summary:** This report provides Cabinet with an early update on the response by KCC and partners to the storms and flooding experienced over the Christmas and New Year period.

**Recommendation(s):** Cabinet is asked to note the contents of the report, including the proposal to provide a full report in the spring.

## 1. Introduction

1.1 This report covers the following:

- Background to flood risk management, emergency planning & response in Kent;
- Overview of events, from lead-up to Christmas storm and floods to the present day;
- Emerging key issues; and
- Next steps.

1.2 Importantly, whilst this report will reference lessons learned and broader flood risk management issues (e.g. spatial planning, planning management, drainage etc.) these matters will be addressed through the appropriate formal channels (including single and multi-agency debriefs and Kent Flood Risk Management Committee) in due course.

## 2. Background

2.1 Following the 2000-2001 wide-area flooding in Kent, the KCC Policy & Resources and Strategic Planning Scrutiny Committees undertook a detailed review of all aspects of the planning, preparations & response, the outcomes of which were published in April 2001.<sup>1</sup>

2.2 The 2000-2001 flooding events made national, and indeed international, news headlines and was one of the '4 Fs' (flooding, fuel protests, foot and mouth and fire strikes) that led directly to the creation of the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA, 2004)<sup>2</sup>. Under the CCA, KCC is classified as a 'Category 1 Responder' (along with the Emergency Services, District / Borough Councils, NHS, EA and others) and has statutory responsibilities for the preparation plans that detail how emergency responders respond to emergencies in Kent, including flooding.

2.3 Following widespread flooding in various parts of the UK in 2007, further fundamental reviews were undertaken by Government ('The Pitt Review'<sup>3</sup>) and KCC<sup>4&5</sup>, which led to significant changes to the way we plan for and manage flood risk and flood emergencies.

<sup>1</sup> <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s14894/Final%20Report.doc.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/36/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/36/contents)

<sup>3</sup> <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=2880>

<sup>4</sup> <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=2878>

<sup>5</sup> <https://shareweb.kent.gov.uk/Documents/Council-and-democracy/select%20committees/flood-risk-report-nov07.pdf>

- 2.4 The Flood & Water Management Act (2010)<sup>6</sup> placed further statutory obligations on KCC and partner organisations, including giving KCC responsibility for developing, maintaining and applying a strategy for local flood risk management in their area as the named 'Lead Local Flood Authority'.
- 2.5 KCC has enacted several changes in response to this new obligation, the most significant change is the development of an overarching flood response plan for Kent, supplemented by 'Local Multi-Agency Flood Plans' for each District / Borough in Kent, which provide detail down to individual community level. In addition, arrangements have been developed to tackle specific issues such as east coast tidal surge or reservoir failure, and a Rapid Response Catchment Emergency Plan has been developed for the Pent Stream. These plans have been supported by a programme of regular multi-agency awareness-raising, training & exercising, with some 25 such events conducted since 2010.
- 2.6 Further information can be found in **Appendix 1** which outlines a) the relationship between flood risk management, emergency planning and response; and b) roles and responsibilities for key partners and **Appendix 2** provides a summary of progress against the recommendations made in the 2007 KCC Select Committee Report.

### 3. Overview of Situation

- 3.1 Storm damage & surface water flooding: From the evening of Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> December, multiple reports of surface water flooding, downed trees and power lines etc. were received from across the county. These were not clearly defined geographical areas, but were spread across Kent, primarily in the west of the county. In addition 28,500 properties across Kent lost power; the majority in west Kent but smaller numbers across Dover, Shepway Thanet and Canterbury Districts. A large power outage affected some 1,000 properties in Vigo, Gravesham. By the end of Boxing Day there remained in excess of 14,000 properties without power across Kent.
- 3.2 River flooding: The EA reported 45 individual areas of flooding, 29 of which experienced residential property flooding, including those below. These figures may include properties where water did not necessarily enter the building, but entered the boundaries of properties.
- **Yalding**: 205 residential properties (including Little Venice Caravan Park)
  - **Hildenborough**: 157 residential properties
  - **Tonbridge**: 102 residential / 19 commercial properties
  - **Collier Street**: 40 residential / 1 commercial properties
  - **Edenbridge**: 30 residential properties
  - **East Peckham**: 20 residential / 3 commercial properties
  - **Maidstone**: 6 residential / 20 commercial properties
  - **East Farleigh**: 9 residential / 2 commercial properties
  - **Dartford**: 10 residential properties
  - **Westerham**: – 6 residential properties
- 3.3 In total 597 households and 51<sup>7</sup> commercial properties were reported as flooded by the EA. The combined total for the 2000-2001 floods in Kent was approximately 1000 properties.
- 3.4 In addition, Ashford town centre and Grove Ferry experienced flooding without property incursion and Aylesford, Canterbury and Fordwich were also identified as at high risk. For all of these, evacuation arrangements were put in place.
- 3.5 Key facts & figures include:
- **33**: Flood Alerts issued for Kent rivers, between 18<sup>th</sup> December & 6<sup>th</sup> January.

<sup>6</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/29/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/29/contents)

<sup>7</sup> Including Bishop's Terrace and Yalding Library

- **28:** Flood Warnings issued for Kent rivers, between 21<sup>st</sup> December & 6<sup>th</sup> January.
- **647:** Confirmed residential & commercial properties flooded.<sup>8</sup>
- **28,500:** Properties without power in Kent.
- **18,941:** Calls to Contact Point over the Christmas period, majority due to flooding.
- **1,500:** Calls to KCC Highways & Transportation about fallen trees.
- **331:** Weather-related incidents attended by KFRS, 78% between 23<sup>rd</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup> December.
- **134:** Rescues by KFRS, 127 on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.
- **57:** Individuals supported by Kent Support & Assistance Service (KSAS)
- **50:** Approximate number of residents evacuated to rest centres on Christmas Eve<sup>9</sup>
- **25:** Multi-agency flood awareness, training & exercise events run in Kent since 2010.
- **995:** Hours worked by EP staff between 22<sup>nd</sup> Dec & 5<sup>th</sup> Jan.

#### 4. The Multi-Agency Response

- 4.1 The following is a brief summary of the KCC and multi-agency response to the situation. Greater detail can be found in **Appendices 3 to 5** and also on KNet and the KCC website<sup>10</sup>.
- 4.2 First warning of high winds from Met Office were received by KCC EP on 20<sup>th</sup> December at 11:00 and a multi-agency conference call set up and chaired by KCC EP at 16:30. Pre-emptive planning, including 'warning and informing' interventions, was mobilised. The storm impacted across Kent from the evening of 23<sup>rd</sup>. The response phase then commenced, addressing significant and wide-scale impacts, including some 28,500 properties without power (the highest figure in the country). The Environment Agency issued Flood Warnings on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, covering rivers in west Kent. The County Emergency Centre (CEC) and Kent Police established a multi-agency Tactical Co-ordinating Centre on 23<sup>rd</sup>, and chaired a Strategic Co-ordinating Group from the 24<sup>th</sup>. The CEC worked with multi-agency partners to co-ordinate door-knocking, evacuations & search & rescue operations by South-East England 4x4 Response, Coastguard Rescue Team, Kent Search & Rescue and St John Ambulance. A rescue operation at Little Venice caravan park, Yalding was mobilised, with many residents evacuated by voluntary sector crews deployed by CEC. At around midnight on 24<sup>th</sup> central Maidstone began to flood. On 27<sup>th</sup> the flood waters begin to recede and Prime Minister visited Yalding. From Monday 30<sup>th</sup> recovery operations began, including a range of support to vulnerable people. The 'emergency phase' was declared over on 6<sup>th</sup> January and lead responsibility passed from Kent Police to KCC for the recovery, however, specific emergencies arising from the storm continued to impact Kent communities.

#### 5. Key Issues

- 5.1 A range of issues have been raised by residents, elected representatives, media commentators and resilience partners in relation to the response to the Christmas and New Year storms and floods. All agencies involved within the response acknowledge their duty to review the effectiveness of their planning and operational response, listen to affected communities and assimilate lessons learned. Amongst the raft of issues raised by residents, the media and other interested parties the following are to the fore:
- Effectiveness and consistency of warning and informing of flood threatened communities;
  - Operation and communication as relates to the EA's Leigh Barrier Flood Storage Area;

<sup>8</sup> Not including surface water flooding & unconfirmed reports.

<sup>9</sup> 37 accommodated in hotels / bed & breakfasts, from Christmas Eve. All from Little Venice caravan park.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.kent.gov.uk/news\\_and\\_events/news/2013/december/on\\_the\\_emergency\\_front\\_line.aspx](http://www.kent.gov.uk/news_and_events/news/2013/december/on_the_emergency_front_line.aspx)

- The scale, urgency & visibility of the multi-agency response within affected communities;
- Difficulties experienced by residents in contacting key organisations;
- Local community resilience and individual householder / business responsibility;
- Provision of sandbags and flood barriers; and
- Effectiveness of current single and multi-agency response plans.

In addition, strategic concerns relating to past and future spatial and planning management decisions, as well as the delivery of sustainable urban drainage (SuDS) and flood defence infra-structure have acquired an added urgency in the wake of recent events.

## 6. Next steps

- 5.1 A range of single and multi-agency debriefs will provide a structured and accountable basis for learning lessons and further refining planning and response contingencies. It is vital that local residents and their elected representatives inform this process and Kent County Council will have a key role in establishing this improved interface.
- 5.2 The multi-agency Recovery Strategy & Plan is being led by KCC and places a great responsibility upon the shoulders of officers and Members to deliver for affected communities and the county as a whole.
- 5.2 A key element of the recovery process is the ongoing calculation of costs accrued by the response agencies. Indeed, KCC and a number of Kent Districts have already submitted expressions of intent to bid against the Bellwin Scheme for emergency financial assistance, which is administered by Department of Communities and Local Government.

## 6. Recommendation(s)

**Recommendation(s):** Cabinet is asked to note the contents of the report, including the proposal to provide a full report in the spring, including findings and recommendations from all single and multi-agency debrief reports.

## 7. Background Documents

- 7.1 Appendices 1-5 and 2001 and 2007 Select Committee Reports.

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