

**West Sussex Joint Scrutiny Steering Group –
Flooding Task and Finish Group**

Notes of a meeting held on 21 October at Horsham District Council

Present: Cllr Roy Barraclough (Worthing Borough Council), Cllr Keith Blake (Crawley Borough Council), Cllr Ann Bridges (Adur District Council), Cllr Jack Callaghan (Mid Sussex District Council), Mr Duncan Crow (West Sussex County Council), Cllr Duncan England (Horsham District Council), Cllr Paul English (Arun District Council), Cllr Henry Potter (Chichester District Council) and Mr Graham Tyler (West Sussex County Council)

In attendance: Rob Castle (Democratic Services, West Sussex County Council), Bryan Curtis (Principal Engineer, Technical Services, Adur District Council and Worthing Borough Council), Ninesh Edwards (Democratic Services, West Sussex County Council), Andrew Gilham, Solent & South Downs Area Flood & Coastal Risk Manager, Environment Agency), Shane Gindra (Resilience & Emergencies Adviser, West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service), Kevin Macknay (Drainage Strategy Team Leader, West Sussex County Council), Stuart Smith (Highways Commissioning Manager, West Sussex County Council), Mark Thompson (Head of Wastewater Assets, Southern Water) and Glen Westmore (Principal Drainage Engineer, West Sussex County Council).

Apologies: Mr Pieter Montyn (Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport, West Sussex County Council) and Mr Lionel Barnard (Cabinet Member for Residents' Services, West Sussex County Council)

Declarations of Interest

1. No interests were declared.

Terms of Reference

2. The Task & Finish Group (TFG) agreed its Terms of Reference.

Flood Risk Management Activities in West Sussex

3. Andrew Gilham spoke to the TFG from the Environment Agency (EA) perspective:

- The EA was the lead authority for managing flood risk from main rivers and the sea and was the link between the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs) such as West Sussex County Council
- The EA produced a national Flood & Coastal Risk Management Strategy, including coastal erosion, which provided an overarching view of the risks, to set the context for LLFAs to produce their own Local Flood Risk Management Strategies (LFRMS)

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- There were 108,700 properties in West Sussex at risk from flooding – 91,000 of these were at risk from surface water flooding, the rest were at risk from river and/or sea flooding
- River/sea flood risk was well mapped, better understood and easier to predict than surface water flooding.
- Most surface water flood risk was in urban areas
- The flooding in June 2012 had been a turning point, pulling Risk Management Authorities together to help address complex local issues
- Improved partnership working had led to a programme on surface water
- Officer resources were stretched in all partner organisations
- West Sussex County Council had improved as an LLFA since the June 2012 flood event
- Future issues
 - Co-ordinated response to future incidents
 - The Regional Flood & Coastal Committee (RFCC) has a role in agreeing local priorities for Flood Defence Grant in Aid or Local Levy funding. The County Council appointed members to the RFCC have a key role to play in raising the profile of investment need in West Sussex.
 - How to prioritise resources amongst areas that suffered regular nuisance flooding compared to those that were at risk from rare, but potentially life threatening coastal flooding
 - Partnership working would be key
 - Flood warnings, planning responses and supporting communities to help themselves would be equally as important as building flood defences

4. Summary of responses to Members' questions and comments:

- The EA provided advice on planning applications, but local authorities made the final decision – development could take place in flood risk areas if the design of buildings was appropriate
- As all budgets were squeezed, maintenance work had to be prioritised – the County Council had set up a community flood fund for riparian issues, but more joined-up working was needed with partners and private landowners
- Sewers were not designed to alleviate flood water, but did help – Southern Water was trying to educate the public so that items that caused blockages did not enter the system
- The EA hoped to devolve internal drainage boards, but was struggling to find a body that would take them on – they could become privately run
- There were plans to bring in ways to force private landowners to clear ditches
- Consideration had to be given to removing/clearing vegetation as some species were important to local eco systems
- Many parish councils and local communities had not taken advantage of help offered through the Community Flood Fund to deal with local flood issues
- The EA was organised on water catchment areas and worked across county borders
- It is important for all LLFAs to engage with the RFCCs. RFCC boundaries broadly follow water catchments. The County Council appoints two members to the Southern RFCC which covers the majority of the county, however Crawley falls within the neighbouring Thames RFCC area. The County Council is represented on the Thames RFCC by another local authority.

5. Shane Gindra spoke to the TFG from Resilience & Emergencies Team perspective:

- The Resilience & Emergencies Team was a category 1 responder before, during and after events, warning and informing the public of the situation
- Communications had been a big issue during the June 2012 flooding
- The team worked with the Sussex Resilience Forum (a non-statutory body) co-ordinating and managing multi-agency partners and supporting exercises
- The team was working with partners on advanced warnings and advising the public on what actions they to take themselves, and what the County Council could do to help
- The need for local communities to help themselves become flood resilient, if they were to cope with flooding in the longer term.
- The team supported recovery efforts and seventeen flood action groups, some of which have bid for funding to carry out work.

6. Summary of responses to Members' questions and comments:

- Un-parished areas would be helped on a Ward basis, through community leaders, or by letting communities decide the best way for themselves
- More parishes/communities needed to be encouraged to form resilience groups
- The Resilience & Emergencies Team supported a mechanism to help those who had been flooded before find insurance cover
- The team had helped with the task of clearing-up after floods
- Local and national flooding awareness campaigns would begin from 1 November

7. Glen Westmore spoke to the TFG about flood risk management working:

- As LLFA, the County Council had a duty to ensure that all authorities carried out their roles and responsibilities - collaborative working had improved after the floods of June 2012
- An LFRMS was being produced and a Strategic group had been set up
- The SE7 network of tier one local authorities had identified flooding as an important area to look at, and could work with regional bodies (such as the EA and housing developers) to get a consistent approach and achieve efficiencies of scale – it also provided a collective response to national consultations
- There were difficulties around reduced budgets, different ways of working between different types of authorities, geographical and demographical differences
- The RFCC should provide coherency, investment, policy and democratic accountability
- The County Council tried to ensure that its two representatives on the Southern RFCC were also on a District or Borough Council and from coastal and urban areas
- The Flood Risk Management Board looked at policies on communications, use of sand bags, planning and highways, and gave strategic direction whilst facing the challenges of dealing with organisations with different structures. There was no representative from Thames Water on the Board.

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- In future, strategic decision-making would help ensure clarity of responsibilities, despite reduced resources
 - A Operations Group made up of District/Borough Council engineers, staff from the EA, Southern Water, planners and the South Downs National Park Authority advised on the strategic direction, and delegated activities and solutions
 - The LLFA deferred to the District/Borough Council engineers when evaluating its resources
 - The new duties, responsibilities and high workloads put more pressure on the need for prioritisation
8. Bryan Curtis added the following points:
- There were nine coastal groups lobbying for a coherent understanding of coastal needs – the South East coastal group had ties with county councils
 - The list of roles and staffing levels needed further work, and partners would need to be sure they had adequate resources to fulfil the roles
9. Mark Thompson spoke to the TFG from the perspective of Southern Water
- Southern Water first got involved in a multi-agency response to flooding after the June 2012 events - its relationships with partners had improved as a result
 - Southern Water now had a good structure in place to deal with issues, communications and was prioritising its resources
 - Future funding and aligning capital programmes and investment would be challenges for the future
 - Southern Water was working on a five-year plan from 2015 that would revolve around partnership working
10. Summary of responses to Members' questions and comments:
- Like West Sussex County Council, Hampshire County Council does not have a seat on the Thames RFCC. Hampshire County Council is represented by another local authority (Berkshire).
 - The County Council's Highways department had little input into the planning application process other than considering the effect on the capacity of the road network – in future the LFRMS would identify areas of high risk, and the introduction of sustainable urban drainage systems, and sustainable drainage systems approval body would help get the mitigation measures needed

Date of the next meeting

11. The TFG would meet again at 10.30am on 29 November at Worthing Borough Council. The focus of the meeting would be: -

- The Local Flood Risk Management Strategy
- Capital Works Programme and Prioritisation
- Partnership Funding
- Non Capital Works: Resilience

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- Other Flood Water Management Act Issues: Sustainable Drainage Systems Approval Body

The meeting ended at 11.51am