

SUFFOLK FLOOD RISK JOINT SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 17 February 2015 at 10:00 am in the Dove Room, Mid Suffolk District Council, Needham Market

The following people were present at the meeting:

Sub-Committee Members:

Councillor Christine Block	Suffolk Coastal District Council
Councillor Sandra Gage	Ipswich Borough Council
Councillor Guy McGregor (Chairman)	Suffolk County Council
Councillor Sara Michell	Mid Suffolk District Council
Councillor Keith Patience	Waveney District Council
Councillor Jim Thorndyke	St Edmundsbury Borough Council
Councillor Tony Simmons	Forest Heath District Council
Councillor Len Young	Babergh District Council

Also present:

Councillor Graham Newman	Cabinet Member for Roads, Transport and Planning, Suffolk County Council
Councillor Mary Evans	Assistant Cabinet Member for Roads, Transport and Planning, Suffolk County Council

Suffolk County Council Officers:

Jane Burch	Flood and Coastal Policy Manager
Neal Evans	Deputy Head of Emergency Planning
Jeff Horner	Flood and Water Manager
Sue Morgan	Head of Democratic Services
Derek Oldham	East Area Highways Manager
Linda Pattle	Democratic Services Officer
David Stiff	Central Area Highways Manager
Alan Thorndyke	Head of Highway Network Management

9. Public participation session

There were no applications to speak in the Public Participation Session.

10. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Jonathan Glerum of Anglian Water.

11. Declarations of Interest and dispensations

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations.

12. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

13. Learning from Localised Flooding Incidents

At Agenda Item 5 the Sub-Committee considered a report referring to flooding incidents in Kesgrave and Sudbury in 2014, setting out what learning there had been from these incidents and how this had been applied.

Recommendation: The Sub-Committee agreed:

- a) That it was satisfied with the methodology for investigating and reporting on flooding incidents, and for following up on actions recommended.
- b) To ask the Flood Risk Management Partnership to bear in mind the importance of listening to local people in relation to pre-existing issues when carrying out investigations.
- c) That the Chairman, on behalf of the Sub-Committee, should lobby the Local Government Association to highlight to potential incoming government, the need to promote consideration by planning authorities of local surface water management plans, particularly in relation to the incremental impact of small scale planning applications and being able to impose appropriate planning conditions.
- d) To invite a representative from Anglian Water to attend a future meeting in order to: address questions including whether Anglian Water had any plans to introduce a stronger managed maintenance regime; and comment on a suggestion that it might need a more community focussed approach to communications following flooding incidents.
- e) That Councillor Len Young would enquire whether Babergh District Council intended to provide individual property level protection (such as flood gates on doors) to the properties affected by the flooding incident in Sudbury.

Reason for Recommendation:

- a) The Sub-Committee heard that the criteria for undertaking an investigation into a flooding incident were clearly set out in the Flood Risk Management Strategy. Members recognised that the Flood Risk Management Partnership had no power to enforce recommendations arising from investigations, but heard that the partners endeavoured to ensure that they were followed up through their action plans, and local communities kept informed by the risk management authorities.

- b) The Sub-Committee considered that sometimes there was a tendency to overlook the fact that there was a great deal of local knowledge available about drainage and the reasons for flooding.
- c) Members were aware that the wider learning from recent flooding incidents was that there was an urgent need for a Sustainable Drainage System. Local authorities had been consulted on proposed legislation to deliver this, but it appeared that no further progress had been made at national level. The lack of progress was of particular concern because currently Highways, when consulted on planning applications, were not able to consider pre-existing drainage problems. They were obliged to advise on the effect of a development individually, but were unable to comment on the cumulative effect of a series of developments.
- d) The Sub-Committee was aware that more regular maintenance of drains could prevent flooding incidents, and wished to know whether Anglian Water had any plans to strengthen its maintenance regime. In relation to the flooding incident in Kesgrave, the Sub-Committee heard that initially communications with affected residents had been good. However, subsequently it appeared that Anglian Water had not kept local residents well informed and that communication about potential timescales could have helped to manage community expectations. It was acknowledged that in this particular case communications might have been adversely affected by on-going litigation.
- e) The Sub-Committee noted that one of the recommendations arising from the flooding incident in Sudbury was that property level protection should be considered by the residents. The properties concerned were owned by Babergh District Council. It was not currently known whether that authority intended to implement the recommendation.

Alternative options: None considered.

Declarations of interest: None declared.

Dispensations: None noted.

14. Use of On-street Parking Account (OSPA) Surplus for Drainage Improvements

At Agenda Item 6 the Sub-Committee considered a report concerning a decision taken by the County Council's Cabinet on 1 July 2014 to allocate £400,000 to be managed by the Area Highways Managers to undertake small local drainage improvements such as new gullies, drains and soakaways. The report outlined the extent to which the Cabinet decision had succeeded in addressing numerous local drainage problems which had been particularly prevalent during the very wet winter of 2013/14.

Recommendation: The Sub-Committee agreed:

- a) That, following the meeting, the county councillors for the Ipswich area should be provided with details about the four specific projects to address the main on-highway concerns in Ipswich referred to in paragraph 7 of Evidence Set 1.
- b) To recommend to officers that they should adopt a more transparent and robust approach to communications by providing information about localised drainage investigations to local Councillors at key times, and by making greater efforts to explain the investigation process, the criteria used and funding methods.
- c) To request an update report on the use of the On-street Parking Account Surplus for drainage improvements at a future meeting.

Reason for Recommendation:

- a) The Sub-Committee heard that the four schemes in Ipswich referred to in paragraph 7 of Evidence Set 1 had already been included in a programme of planned work for 2014/15 before the additional allocation had been agreed in July 2014, therefore they were not included under the OSPA funded programme. However, it appeared that the county councillors for the Ipswich area were unaware of the schemes.
- b) In general, the Sub-Committee was satisfied with the arrangements outlined in the report at Agenda Item 6. However, members considered that further efforts could be made to have a dialogue with local representatives. Members stressed that local councillors could potentially assist with identifying issues locally. The Sub-Committee heard that area highways managers at times attended meetings of the Suffolk Association of Local Councils in order to communicate with parish councils. Councillor Gage pointed out that there were no parish councils within the area of Ipswich Borough Council, and therefore alternative means of promoting dialogue with local communities in Ipswich might need to be considered. The Sub-Committee noted that as part of the review of the Management Strategy, the Flood Risk Management Partnership would be reconsidering its approach to communications, and the Sub-Committee's recommendation could be taken into account.
- c) The Sub-Committee noted that to date only one of the 35 OSPA funded drainage schemes had been completed. Members understood that this apparent lack of progress was in part due to the fact that detailed investigations were required in many flooding cases before it could be established what works may be required. Determining these works was often complex and issues such as land ownership and precise legal responsibilities needed to be established. However, it was clear that greater priority had been given to other highways programmes, because of the need to spend the allocated resources, otherwise the allocation would be time expired. The Sub-Committee wished to see the OSPA funded

schemes expedited, and therefore requested a progress report at a subsequent meeting.

Alternative options: None considered.

Declarations of interest: None declared.

Dispensations: None noted.

15. Preparedness of communities to deal with major flooding incidents

At Agenda Item 7 the Sub-Committee considered a report about how communities in Suffolk were supported to prepare for potential flooding. The Sub-Committee also received written information provided by Ofwat which referred to its role and responsibilities and the limited extent to which it could influence water authorities to commit to investing more resources to address known flood risks.

Recommendation: The Sub-Committee agreed

- a) That in general it was satisfied with the efforts being made to help communities to prepare themselves to deal with flooding incidents, as set out in Evidence Set 1 to the report at Agenda Item 7.
- b) To recommend that further efforts be made to engage with local communities and local representatives in Ipswich on the subject of flood preparedness.

Reason for Recommendation:

- a) The Sub-Committee heard that in most parts of the county good progress was being made in helping communities to prepare for flooding incidents. Measures taken by the Environment Agency included providing information by means of their website, publishing self-help emergency guidelines, and encouraging people to sign up to receive flood warning messages. In addition, an officer had been designated as the specific lead for community resilience. Steps had also been taken to make it easier for county councillors to use some of their locality budgets to help communities develop emergency plans. Nevertheless, the Sub-Committee recognised that more could be done to improve flood preparedness throughout the county.
- b) The Sub-Committee was aware that progress in fostering community engagement in emergency planning had been slow in urban areas such as Ipswich. Councillor Gage offered her assistance in facilitating dialogue with the Ipswich Area Committees.

Alternative options: None considered.

Declarations of interest: None declared.

Dispensations: None noted.

16. Forward Work Programme and Date of Next Meeting

The Sub-Committee discussed its forward work programme. Members noted that the next meeting of the Suffolk Flood Risk Management Partnership would take place on Thursday, 23 April 2015 from 1.30 to 4.00 pm at the Environment Agency offices, Cobham Rd, Ipswich, IP3 9JD.

The Sub-Committee agreed:

- a) To ask Anglian Water to provide information for the next meeting about its approach to flood risk assessment.
- b) That at its next meeting it would consider any changes to the Suffolk Flood Risk Management Strategy proposed by the Flood Risk Management Partnership.
- c) That its next meeting would take place on a date to be arranged in late June or early July 2015, if possible at the offices of Mid Suffolk District Council.

The meeting closed at 12:37 pm.