

Extract from the minutes of the Suffolk Flood Risk Joint Scrutiny Sub-Committee 30 October 2015

Present: Councillors Mary Evans (Chairman, Suffolk County Council), Stephen Williams (Babergh District Council), Christine Mason (Forest Heath District Council), Sandra Gage (Ipswich Borough Council), Roy Barker (Mid Suffolk District Council), David Roach (St Edmundsbury Borough Council) and Keith Patience (Waveney District Council).

Also present: Councillor James Caston (Mid Suffolk District Council)

Supporting officers present: Jane Burch, Flood and Coastal Policy Manager
Simon Curl, Flood and Water Manager
Sue Morgan, Head of Democratic Services
Linda Pattle, Democratic Services Officer

7. Implementation of Sustainable Drainage (SuDS) Legislation

At Agenda Item 7 the Sub-Committee considered a report, setting out the way in which the Suffolk Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) and Suffolk County Council were working together to implement SuDS legislation.

The Chairman welcomed the following witnesses:

Graham Thomas, Head of Planning and Environment, Essex County Council
Patsy Dobson, Development Manager Team Leader (Central Area), Suffolk Coastal District Council

Denis Cooper, Senior Engineer, Suffolk County Council and Ipswich Borough Council

Mr Thomas gave a presentation about the work of the Essex Lead Local Flood Authority.

Recommendations: The Sub-Committee agreed:

- (a) To recommend that, with the advice of the Suffolk Flood and Coastal Policy Manager, the Suffolk Chief Fire Officer should consider adopting the model of community engagement used by Essex Fire Service for communities affected by flooding.
- (b) To recommend that each planning committee (members and substitute members) in Suffolk should receive training on assessing possible flood risk, including understanding the wider context to which each planning application related.
- (c) To recommend that Suffolk County Council should consider providing a short video summary of the Suffolk Flood Risk Management Strategy, similar to that produced by Essex County Council.
- (d) To recommend to the Suffolk County Council Cabinet Member with responsibility for flooding:

- i) That he should seek the support of Suffolk Public Sector Leaders to develop a consistent approach to charging for pre-application advice in respect of SuDs.
- ii) That he should recommend to the County Council's Cabinet that adequate resources should be made available for the Council to administer its duties under the Flood and Water Management Act.
- iii) That he should work with District and Borough colleagues to encourage communities to pick up their responsibilities in relation to flood risk management.
- iv) That he should consider using council tax information to encourage individual householders to maintain their property to reduce the risk of flooding.
- v) That he should ask the Cabinet to consider the Council's position with regard to supporting suitable arrangements for the adoption and long term maintenance of SuDs.
- vi) That he should recommend to the Local Government Association (LGA) that they work with the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) proposing that where appropriate SuDs that are coterminous with green space be part of the infrastructure for new developments and encourage consideration of long term maintenance as part of the project design.

Reasons for recommendation:

- a) The Sub-Committee heard that the Planning and Environment Team at Essex County Council worked very closely with the Essex Fire Service. A large number of volunteers assisted the Essex Fire Service, and some of this voluntary work involved proactive, small scale, low cost interventions to help prevent flooding. The Sub-Committee considered that such a model could work well in Suffolk.
- b) The Sub-Committee was aware that the members and substitute members of the county's planning committees were regularly offered training. Members considered that it would be helpful if this could include briefings to help planning committee members become more aware of flood risk generally and of national planning policies relating to SuDS in particular, bearing in mind the need to ensure that new developments did not create new flood risks elsewhere in the county.
- c) The Sub-Committee watched a five minute animated video about the Essex Flood Risk Management Strategy. Members considered this an excellent way of highlighting key messages about the Strategy, and thought there would be benefit in producing something similar for Suffolk.
- d)(i) The Sub-Committee was aware that many developers were seeking advice about how to fulfil their obligations under the new SuDS legislation. In Essex developers could take advantage of a pre-application service in return for a fee. In Suffolk some, but not all, planning authorities charged for providing such advice. The Sub-Committee considered that developers should be charged for advice, and suggested that the Public

Sector Leaders would be the appropriate group to consider establishing a consistent charging policy in Suffolk.

- d)(ii) The Sub-Committee recorded its appreciation of the highly valuable work carried out by the Flood and Coastal Policy Manager and her colleagues. However, they noted that at the County Council there were five officers in the County Council's flood team, and 1.5 fte dealing with SuDS. Members were aware that in recent years, as a result of retirements and resignations, a great deal of expertise had been lost to the county in general. They therefore requested that the Cabinet Member should consider whether there were adequate resources to fulfil the Council's legal obligations.
- d)(iii) Members recognised that, in view of the limited resources available, there was a need to encourage a "self help" attitude, within a managed framework. They heard about some good examples of managed community schemes for clearing gullies and ditches. The Sub-Committee considered that parish councils should be encouraged to take part in such schemes.
- d)(iv) The Sub-Committee recognised there was a need to make householders aware of the measures they could take to reduce the risk of flooding, such as avoiding blocking drains with fats and oils. It was suggested that it would be useful to include information about this with the annual Council Tax letter which districts and boroughs sent to householders.
- d)(v) The Sub-Committee was aware that the success of the new SuDS legislation depended on appropriate arrangements being put in place to ensure that drainage schemes for new developments were adopted and maintained on a long-term basis. However, members heard that these arrangements had not yet been agreed. One alternative was for the maintenance to be the responsibility of a management company, but it was not clear where the responsibility would lie if the company ceased to exist. Another possibility was for the responsibility to rest with Anglian Water, but recently potential problems had arisen with this alternative. It was suggested that the Cabinet should consider how the County Council could support the establishment of appropriate arrangements.
- d)(vi) It was recognised that architects had an important role to play in ensuring the success of the new SuDS legislation, by paying greater attention to long-term maintenance of drainage as part of the design of new housing developments. The Sub-Committee considered that it would be appropriate to ask the LGA to take this up with the RIBA.

Alternative options: None considered.

Declarations of interest: None declared.

Dispensations: None noted.

