

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 20 MARCH 2014

UPDATE ON FLOOD RESPONSE AND FUTURE ACTION

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF ENVIRONMENT AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES

(Contact: Claire Locke, Tel: (01993) 861344)

(The decisions on this matter will be resolutions and/or recommendations to Cabinet)

1. PURPOSE

To update members on the Council's response to flood events during December 2013 – February 2014, on-going discussions with Thames Water and highlight the actions necessary to mitigate flood risk.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (a) That, the information be noted; and
- (b) That, the committee decides what, if any, further action it wishes to take on flooding issues.

3. BACKGROUND

A co-ordinated approach

- 3.1. In 2007 West Oxfordshire, was amongst a number of areas which, experienced a high level of widespread internal property flooding and saw access to some towns and villages severely affected as fluvial, ground water, sewer and surface water flooding occurred following an intense period of heavy rainfall.
- 3.2. The subsequent reviews and inquiries into these flood events and how they had been managed were fed into the Pitt Review, an independent review conducted by Sir Michael Pitt into the lessons that could be learned from the floods in the summer of 2007. One of the key recommendations of the Review was greater coordination and clearer definition of roles as there was confusion regarding responsibility for responding to flood events and managing the day to day planning and managing of flood related matters. As a result of the Pitt Review the 'Flood and Water Management Act 2010' was enacted with provisions which included the creation of 'Local Lead Flood Authorities (LLFA)'. All unitary or two tier County Councils became the LLFA for their area and are assigned a number of duties and powers relating to the management of local flood risk.
- 3.3. Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) therefore became the LLFA for Oxfordshire and are the coordinating and managing body for responding to and planning for flood risks. OCC has a statutory responsibility to prepare a Flood Management Strategy to manage flood risk.
- 3.4. OCC are responsible for the following functions, and West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) can assist using local knowledge and resources:
 - Monitor and collect information on flood events
 - Ensure riparian owners undertake ditch and river clearance

- Work with other partners to reduce flood risk i.e. Environment Agency, Thames Water, and Highways Authority.
 - Develop Community Resilience
- 3.5. Whilst WODC has a key role to play in supporting the LLFA and in undertaking its role as a Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (in planning for and responding to emergencies and aiding in recovery), its role is now very different from that in 2007 following the Flood and Water Management Act.
- 3.6. The district's key roles are now limited to:
- Maintaining and clearing specific ditches and watercourses for which WODC are responsible.
 - Providing welfare assistance to residents in an emergency and during recovery e.g. provision of rest centres, clean up.
 - Providing temporary accommodation for displaced residents where necessary
 - Issuing sandbags in line with WODC sandbag policy
- 3.7. The District has permissive powers to carry out work on ordinary watercourses, which means it may undertake this work but is not required to do so. When the Flood and Water Management Act was implemented and responsibilities for flooding changed with the creation of Local Lead Flood Authorities, district councils lost the funding contribution for land drainage which was previously received through Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and this was included in the County Council's RSG allocation. WODC does not therefore automatically carry out work to maintain third party ordinary watercourses as it does not receive funding or have a statutory obligation to do so.

The events of Winter 2013/14

- 3.8. West Oxfordshire in common with the rest of the county and the country experienced unusually high rainfall since mid-December 2013. This has resulted in two flooding events which centred on the River Windrush around Witney and the River Thames around the Bablock Hythe areas, with the Environment Agency (EA) issuing flood alerts and flood warnings for these Rivers. The flooding in these areas did not reach the levels experienced in 2007 and the events did not warrant the triggering of the council's emergency plan in full. However a small number of residential and commercial properties suffered internal flooding. There was also significant flooding of agricultural land in the district.
- 3.9. A total of five residential properties in Witney and one in Middle Barton were flooded together with eight commercial properties in Witney and one in Shilton. Many of these properties suffered repeat flooding during this period.
- 3.10. A total of 16 households were evacuated by WODC from a residential mobile home park in Bablock Hythe with ten being moved to temporary accommodation and six staying with relatives, with the remainder supported in staying in their homes.
- 3.11. One of the worst affected areas was West End, Witney, with eight business premises flooded which is having a significant impact on those businesses.
- 3.12. Foul sewer inundation and flooding continues to occur at Brize Norton, The Piggeries in Northmoor and the High Street in Clanfield. These issues have been discussed in detail with Thames Water and a summary of the responses is included later in this report.

- 3.13. Flooding of roads rendered some villages difficult to access during the height of the bad weather.
- 3.14. The Council provided 17 tonnes of sand and approximately 3000 empty sandbags which were delivered to neighbourhood sandbag points and 4300 filled sandbags were handed out from the depot in Witney. The Council also supported military strategic operations, providing 10,000 tonnes of sand to protect homes and vital infrastructure.
- 3.15. In addition the Council also provided the free removal of flood damaged goods from domestic properties.
- 3.16. WODC incurred costs of £25,802 in responding to the emergency. This does not include officer time during standard working hours. A Bellwin claim was submitted although under the Bellwin scheme authorities are required to pay the initial 'threshold' amount, which is £15,922 for WODC.

Recovery

- 3.17. The Council has been assisting those who suffered flooding by advising them on safe clean-up, providing free collection of flood damaged goods from residential properties, advising on measures they may take to prevent future property flooding and sign posting them to other assistance that is being made available.
- 3.18. A report on 'Flood Support Packages' was considered by Cabinet on 12th March, for the provision of WODC managed grants, including Business rate relief, Business support grants and repair and renewal grants for businesses and a Council Tax Discount and a severe weather recovery scheme to assist householders affected.
- 3.19. There is further assistance such as 'Support for Farmers' grants available direct from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Details can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/farming-recovery-fund-guidance-for-applicants>
- 3.20. OCC have highlighted their role in building community resilience; providing support to communities to develop plans to enable them to respond effectively at a local level should emergencies occur. This will be of particular importance in areas where flood alleviation works are not viable such as Bablock Hythe. It should be noted however that community resilience would cover any emergency and not be limited to flood risks.

Preventing future property flooding

- 3.21. The County Council hosted a flood forum on 1st March for Members, Town and Parish Councils and community flood interest groups to gain feedback on the recent flood events. WODC was well represented and the problems experienced in the district and the need for strategic investment to tackle problems in Witney, provide district wide water course clearance and tackle highway flooding were highlighted.
- 3.22. The Leader of the Council will represent the Council at the Oxfordshire Strategic Flood Summit on 21st March which will consider the high level issues in each area and seek to identify the strategic investment required for major flood defences or initiatives to reduce flood risk.

3.23. The four key areas which WODC has highlighted through these events are set out below:

- The EA commissioned an Initial Assessment Report in 2013, which, it is understood, should be published in March. The report identifies the strategic flood defences on the River Windrush the EA could put in place in Witney to reduce flood risk. It is estimated that strategic defences would cost in the region of £1.3 M. This would benefit the properties internally flooded (i.e. West End and Bridge Street) and threatened with flooding (i.e. Bridge Street & Riverside Gardens) in Witney but also those affected downstream and prevent Highway flooding which can result in long traffic diversions. Financial commitment would need to be secured for the strategic scheme to prevent the frequent repeat flood events in Witney.
- Clearance and desilting of main arterial waterways, resulting in greater capacity and free flow of rivers is required. Whilst these rivers are generally enmained and the responsibility of the EA. The EA have stated that they are not able to undertake this work, some riparian owners also consider the work too extensive for them to undertake and this is impacting on the clearance by riparian owners of smaller ditches and watercourses, as this work is considered of limited value if main rivers are not cleared. An estimated one off investment of £1 M is required to enable this backlog of maintenance work to be completed. The responsibility for regular maintenance could then be undertaken by the riparian owners.
- Bablock Hythe – very few properties are at risk of internal flooding and flooding is difficult to defend against. Community resilience needs to be strengthened to support residents who are older and may require support due to their health and mobility. The County Council have an active programme of assistance to develop community resilience.
- Action to tackle Highway flooding which impedes access to homes and renders some roads impassable – solutions will vary but will generally include action from the Highway Authority and those responsible for local watercourses e.g. repeated flooding of Langley Lane at junction of A4095. There is a particular issue with flooding of bridges crossing the River Windrush at Minster Lovell and Crawley and the knock-on impact this has on traffic levels in Witney particularly in the Air quality Management Area.

Flood Management Strategy for Oxfordshire

- 3.24. The County Council as the LLFA is required to produce a flood management strategy. OCC are currently drafting the strategy which, it is anticipated, will be out to consultation around June 2014. This Strategy will consider all flood issues, including the LLFA's objectives for managing flood risk, measures proposed to achieve those objectives, how and when the measures are expected to be implemented, costs and benefits and funding sources and assessment of local flood risk. WODC will be contributing to this document to ensure WODC issues are considered appropriately.
- 3.25. The Council will continue to support the LLFA to secure support for investment in these areas through the Flood Management Strategy. The Council may wish to consider allocating funding to support any strategic investment in flood alleviation schemes in the District and to encourage other partners to contribute.

- 3.26. A report on the OCC Flood Management Strategy for Oxfordshire and the strategic scheme for Witney will be provided to Members once the EA Initial Flood Assessment report has been published and further information is known.

Thames Water Issues

- 3.27. At the meeting of the Committee held on 6 June 2013, Members received information from Mr Huw Thomas of Thames Water regarding the Company's Investment Programme for 2014-2020 and measures proposed to address specific flooding issues in West Oxfordshire. The Committee raised a number of concerns and a letter was sent to Thames Water seeking responses to the queries.
- 3.28. The Committee gave consideration to responses received from Thames Water at the meeting held on 26 September 2013 and further updates were given at subsequent meetings.
- 3.29. As a result of continued concerns a meeting was held between the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of this committee and Huw Thomas on 5 March 2014 to discuss progress on a number of strategic and location specific matters.
- 3.30. In respect of strategic matters it was reported that Thames Water was taking a change of approach from the previous Infiltration Strategy to a broader strategy that includes Inundation and Surface Water Connections. They have currently started work doing on-site surveys in WODC and some desktop modelling had progressed. If there are matters that can be easily rectified i.e. by sealing manholes this will be done out of current maintenance budgets. Full details in respect of flooding and sewer issues can be accessed at <http://www.thameswater.co.uk/help-and-advice/16739.htm>
- 3.31. An update was also given in respect of the five year Plan 2015-2020 process. Thames Water submitted a draft plan in December 2013 and a response from the regulator OFWAT is expected in spring 2014. Depending on the response the plan will be refined as necessary by December 2014. Approval from OFWAT would then be anticipated by January 2015 with implementation in April 2015. Full details can be found at <http://www.thameswater.co.uk/about-us/17481.htm>
- 3.32. Attached at Appendix A is a summary of the items discussed. A full response is awaited from Thames Water and this will be circulated prior to the meeting.

4. ALTERNATIVES/OPTIONS

The Council could further reduce its role in responding to flood events and comply solely with the requirement to act as a Category one responder; managing the emergency and recovery.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific financial implications associated with this report. Capital requirements to support future schemes would be subject to a separate report.

6. RISKS

None

7. REASONS

The work relating to flood prevention in the district accords with the council priorities to protect and enhance the environment of West Oxfordshire and maintain the District as a clean, beautiful place with low levels of crime and nuisance and work in partnership to sustain vibrant, healthy and economically prosperous towns and villages with full employment.

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Background Papers:

None

Thames Water sewerage flooding issues in West Oxfordshire

Strategic Issues

WODC have asked but have not had a satisfactory response in respect of the following questions:

Where is the infiltration strategy?

What work is it planned to do and to which Pumping Stations?

What properties are going to be helped?

A remedial and infiltration plan is needed so we know what it is intended to do to resolve the repeat problems we are seeing in a number of locations with inundation of systems, sewers backing up, surcharging and homes left without flushing toilets or experiencing sewage flooding in gardens and in some cases, internally.

Location specific

Brize Norton – Problems between Station Road and Crash Gate 5 at the back of Brize Norton – foul sewage in fields. Whilst there is no associated internal property flooding West Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council have carried out work to surface water drainage but need to know what Thames Water intend to do to resolve sewer flooding.

A further issue is the unknown level of waste water flows from Brize Norton base, the strategic development at Carterton and the impact of these two things on the existing infrastructure in that area.

Finally in respect of Brize Norton a query has been raised regarding the water main pipe from Worsham to Carterton. This pipe keeps bursting, the workmen have said this is because it is no longer 'fit for purpose'. The concern is that if this is the case then leakages could be causing localised flooding. They also said that they would return to make good the verges and farm track when the ground dried up a bit - that was at the beginning of 2013 and nothing has been done yet.

Northmoor – specific problem at a property with sewer backing up and sewage surcharging through a shower. An update on what Thames Water has done is requested.

North Leigh – Work has reportedly been carried out – can Thames Water confirm this has been completed?

Clanfield – High Street, shallow sewer being inundated with ground water causing sewers to back up. Homes without flushing toilets etc.

Carterton Pavilion (retention pond) – what are Thames Water doing to further reduce the flow out of this pond?

Standlake – An update on the effectiveness of works undertaken including repairs to the reducing valve is requested.