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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 1 SEPTEMBER 2014

Councillors Present: Brian Bedwell (Chairman), Jeff Brooks (Vice-Chairman), Paul Bryant (Substitute) (In place of Dave Goff), Sheila Ellison, Roger Hunneman, Alan Macro, Garth Simpson, Virginia von Celsing and Quentin Webb

Also Present: Sean Anderson (Head of Customer Services), Nick Carter (Chief Executive), Andy Day (Head of Strategic Support), Mark Edwards (Head of Highways and Transport), June Graves (Head of Care Commissioning, Housing & Safeguarding), Mark Lewis (Education Assets Manager), Carolyn Richardson (Civil Contingencies Manager) and Jon Winstanley (Projects Manager - Highways & Transport), David Lowe (Scrutiny & Partnerships Manager) and Charlene Myers (Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Dave Goff, Councillor Mike Johnston, Councillor Emma Webster and Councillor Laszlo Zverko

PART I

31. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

32. **Severe winter weather 2013/2014**

Councillor Brian Bedwell thanked Members for attending the meeting and encouraged any Members present during the course of the review to participate in the meeting on 15th September 2014 in order to incorporate the collective views of the Commission.

David Lowe introduced the item to the Commission and highlighted the meeting format which had been outlined in the cover report, the order and timing allocated for speakers had been amended in order to accommodate Members' commitments to existing meetings.

Appendix A, Winter Floods and Storms 2013/2014, was presented to the Commission as a draft report. The Commission was advised that the scrutiny review would contribute towards the final draft and formation of recommendations which would subsequently be issued to the Executive for consideration.

Councillor Jeff Brooks asked when the timetable of meetings had been agreed, he could not recall being consulted. David Lowe advised that the scoping document was presented at the meeting on 1 July 2014 and subsequently agreed.

In response to questions asked, Andy Day advised that if a recommendation had national implications then the Executive would be asked to submit the details of the recommendation to Central Government in writing. It was agreed that national recognition would encourage agencies' accountability.

Civil Contingencies

Carolyn Richardson was invited to summarise the effects and response to recent severe weather by providing a presentation which outlined the following;

- Emergency planning legislation
- Roles and responsibilities & preplanning
- What happened during recent severe weather
- The impact in West Berkshire
- The response provided
- The recovery process
- The lessons learnt so far.

Carolyn Richardson proceeded to explain that the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 defined the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) and its responsibilities and powers. Carolyn Richardson advised that West Berkshire Council was defined as the LLFA and the core function sat within the Highways and Transport Service. The LLFA was responsible for the development, maintenance, application and monitoring of the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (LFRMS) and was required to consult the public and local risk management authorities on its LFRMS.

It was the responsibility of the LLFA to establish and maintain a register of structures or features which, in the opinion of the authority, were likely to have a significant effect on a flood risk in its area and set up a committee to oversee the flood risk management functions of the local authority's area.

The FWMA imposed duties on LLFAs to Investigate flooding incidents, (referred to as Section 19) and co-operate with other Risk Management Authorities (RMA).

The LLFAs had the powers to:

- Consent works on ordinary watercourses (watercourses not overseen by the Environment Agency)
- Designate 3rd party assets that affected flood risk and give notice to owners that the assets had been adopted
- Request information from Risk Management Authorities
- Carry out works relating to groundwater and surface water flooding
- Approve / reject Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS).

Carolyn Richardson provided Members with a slide to illustrate the roles and responsibilities of agencies and the general public (specifically riparian owners) as defined within the FWMA and detailed locally within the LFRMS.

The Commission heard that the Emergency Planning function was underpinned by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (CCA). The legislation defined the scale of incidents as the following:

1. Emergency: an event or situation which presented a serious threat to:
 - Human welfare
 - The environment
 - Political, administrative or economic stability
 - The security of a place

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2. Major incident: an emergency that required the implementation of special arrangements by one or more of the emergency services, the NHS or the local authority to address:

- Large numbers of casualties
- Large numbers of people involved
- Large volumes of enquiries
- the requirement for large scale resources.

Carolyn Richardson explained that an Emergency was more commonly experienced due to the scale of impact. A Major Incident usually prompted the need for extensive resources as was experienced on 7th February 2014 when West Berkshire declared a Major Incident.

The Commission heard that, as detailed within the CCA, it was the responsibility of the Local Authority to:

- Undertake risk assessments;
- Develop Emergency Plans;
- Develop Business Continuity Plans;
- Arrange to make information available to the public about civil protection matters and maintain arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public in the event of an emergency;
- Share information with other local responders to enable greater co-ordination;
- Co-operate with other local responders to enhance greater co-ordination and efficiency; and
- Provide advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations about business continuity management.

Specifically the Council was required to:

- Support the Emergency Services
- Co-ordinate voluntary support
- Manage evacuees and survivors
- Provide an emergency mortuary
- Co-ordinate the recovery phase
- Maintain essential services

Carolyn Richardson explained that the CCA defined two groups of responders who had different degrees of responsibility and duty. Category One responders were subject to the full set of duties as detailed within the CCA, these were:

- Police
- Fire & Rescue Service
- Ambulance Service
- Local Authorities
- Environment Agency
- Hospital Trusts
- NHS England

Category two responders were referred to as 'co-operating bodies'. They were less likely to be involved in the heart of planning work, but would be heavily involved in incidents that affected their own sector. Category 2 responders had a lesser set of duties which were broadly around co-operating and sharing relevant information with other Category 1 and 2 responders. Category 2 responders were:

- Utilities

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- Communications companies
- HSE
- Highways Agency
- Ports and airports
- Clinical Commissioning Groups

Councillor Bedwell asked whether the declaration of a Major Incident by one agency was supported by the other responders. Carolyn Richardson advised that the declaration would be supported and resources offered irrespective of which agency declared a major incident. If the incident was slow building then it was often the case that agencies participated in teleconferences over a period of time, therefore, the pressures and challenges faced by responders would be known and the need for additional resources pre-empted. Carolyn Richardson advised that agencies were fully supportive of the decision made by the Council to declare a Major Incident on 7th February 2014.

Carolyn Richardson stated that the Military was not defined as a responder within the CCA and therefore was not subject to the same duties. In response to questions asked, Carolyn Richardson advised that the Military assistance arrived in West Berkshire on Saturday 8th February 2014. Carolyn Richardson advised that their arrival was swift due to the strong working relationship in place with the Joint Regional Liaison Officer (Lieutenant Colonel PCE Mileham RA).

Responding agencies had specific responsibilities both in the preplanning stages and during the course of a response. These were:

Police

- Scene coordination
- Cordon control
- Investigations
- Oversee the casualty bureau

Fire & Rescue Service

- Fire & Rescue and water rescue
- Mass decontamination
- Urban Search & Rescue
- Pumping
- Fire Safety

Environment Agency

- Managed flood alerts
- Management of main rivers

To enhance resilience and understanding amongst responders it was vital that agencies worked together. The Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum (TVLRF) used the National Risk Register to develop a Community Risk Register, through which they could identify the need to develop, train and exercise plans by establishing subject matter task and finish groups. The Berkshire Resilience Forum provided agencies with the opportunity to meet twice yearly to enhance working relationships.

Carolyn Richardson provided a slide to illustrate the various plans in place to address identified risks. Plans were developed at various levels, Thames Valley, Berkshire and West Berkshire; the need for each was determined by the assessed level of risk and local relevance. The full suite of plans would not necessarily be relevant in the case of severe

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weather but it was recognised that an effect of flooding could lead to another plan being activated, such as the Evacuation Plan if residents could not return to their homes. West Berkshire plans were underpinned by the Major Incident Plan.

In moving to discuss the specifics of the 2013/2014 severe weather, Carolyn Richardson advised that the incident escalated significantly when the River Thames levels increased dramatically. In the build up key agencies participated in daily teleconferences in order to prepare resources and share vital information. Due to strain on Council resources caused by a series of storms, unprecedented volumes of rainfall and increasing river levels, West Berkshire Council declared a Major Incident on 7th February 2014. The Council then established and operated a full Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) 24/7 for 2 weeks. Full command and control arrangements were established in the Thames Valley, a Tactical Coordinating Centre (TCG) was located within the Council building and a Strategic Coordinating Centre (SCG) established at Kidlington. As the level of the required response decreased the SCG formally ceased on 21st February 2014, at which point the Council coordinated the Recovery phase. Carolyn Richardson advised that the incident 'ended' in June 2014 at which point the last flood alert was removed by the EA, however, the recovery effort continued and in some cases was still underway.

Page 34 and 35 of the agenda provided statistics to illustrate the extent of ground water levels and the volume through the course of the year. It would normally be expected that ground water levels decreased through the summer and autumn months allowing sufficient capacity within the aquifers to store average levels of rainfall during wetter months. Carolyn Richardson explained that the impact of severe weather in West Berkshire was evident in the unusually high groundwater levels through 2013 and early 2014.

The combination of high winds and an unprecedented volume of rainfall over a prolonged period significantly impacted the local area, most noticeably through 14th - 17th February by when the EA had issued 3 Fluvial Flood Warnings, 7 Fluvial Flood Alerts and 2 Groundwater Alerts. All rivers and all sections of the rivers were affected to the extent that the risk of flooding to properties was evident. Carolyn Richardson stated that the period was extremely challenging in terms of managing resources and establishing priorities.

Members were advised that the impact of the weather was evident across the district, in particular at the Scottish and Southern Electricity Grid Site at Burghfield as the site was threatened by flood water, resources were committed to ensure the site remained operational. Andy Day explained that reports on the situation were escalated to Central Government (Cabinet Office Briefing Room A – COBRA), due to the risk that thousands of local residents could lose power if the site flooded.

Some communities were isolated as access though key roads became restricted due to flooding and subsequently closed to ensure drivers' safety. Similarly, the Newbury Station and Junction 13 of the M4(A34) experienced serious flooding which restricted travel.

Some communities experienced significant problems with waste water disposal. Water infiltrating the network resulted in sewage surcharging into properties and out from manhole covers onto roads and gardens. In some cases people lost the use of their basic facilities within their homes as the network became overwhelmed.

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High winds led to a large number of trees falling, minor structural damage and numerous power outages.

Carolyn Richardson stated that it was impossible to quantify the emotional impact that the recent weather had on affected communities. The Commission heard that the debrief surveys issued to residents, Parish Councils, Flood Wardens and businesses provided statistical evidence on the impact but could not highlight the psychological effect. Councillor Sheila Ellison advised that following the 2007 floods in Thatcham a series of public meetings took place, which were considered by many to be therapeutic as they provided an opportunity to speak to agencies direct.

Carolyn Richardson advised that in response to the issues identified, the Council had deployed individual pumps to vulnerable homes and with the help of the EA and RBFRS located larger pumps in strategic locations. Sandbag walls were put in place to reduce flooding from large sites and portaloos were deployed to communities who had lost the use of facilities within their homes,

There was some difficulty ensuring the resources were effective, as demonstrated with the number of road closures lifted by drivers. The RBFRS conducted numerous rescues from flood water as drivers drove through road closures which had been established to minimise the risk of drivers becoming stranded and to stop bow waves flooding nearby homes.

Andy Day suggested that Parish Councils could purchase pumps in advance as they were vital in some cases to avoid flooding but difficult to obtain due to the level of demand. The Commission discussed the use of a central storage location so that Parish Councils might access resources rather than individually purchase items.

Carolyn Richardson advised that through the work of Stuart Clark (Principal Engineer) the Council planned to review areas which flooded through the completion of the Section 19 reports. They would consider strategic locations for pumps and sandbags as it was intended that by doing so there would be less demand on resources and their effectiveness could be maximised.

Councillor Ellison suggested that historical information would aid agency understanding of flooding in certain areas and referred specifically to Newbury train station. Carolyn Richardson thanked Councillor Ellison for the suggestion and advised that historical information was often reviewed as each flood incident was different.

Carolyn Richardson advised that the EOC was supported by Liaison Officers who would monitor the situation directly within communities and then feedback to the EOC and TCG.

Councillor Alan Macro highlighted that the report suggested staff felt facilities within the EOC were inadequate. Carolyn Richardson advised that the functionality of the EOC developed through the course of the response, in the early stages the multi agency representatives sat within the EOC which caused a lot of noise and disruption. Through the establishment of the TCG the disruption was minimised. Carolyn Richardson advised that the technological facilities used within the EOC were adequate, although the Information Management system required a review to improve efficiency.

Andy Day advised that 176 people across the Council assisted in the EOC and that due to the scale of the incident it was necessary to ask all staff to assist, irrespective of previous training. The majority of staff said they had enjoyed helping and would help again if required. It was stated that assistance was also received from the Emergency

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Planning Officers in the Royal borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and Reading Councils.

Councillor Quentin Webb referred to a comment within the agenda which suggested that the EOC failed to adequately communicate with the Customer Contact Centre. Carolyn Richardson acknowledged that there had been some challenges with sharing information, in part due to the necessity of using inexperienced staff within the EOC the variations in style during handover.

In explaining the relationship between the EOC and TCG, which had been situation in Committee room 1 and 2 at Market Street, Carolyn Richardson stated that the TCG coordinated the multi-agency response and linked to the SCG and EOC, which in turn coordinated the Council's Response. The location of the TCG was effective, reinforced by the positive feedback received from agencies.

Councillor Jeff Brooks asked whether the new RBFRS station at Theale could be considered as an alternative EOC/TCG location and in response Carolyn Richardson advised that discussions were underway to explore the feasibility of using the building.

Carolyn Richardson advised that the TCG was pivotal in coordinating the allocation of military aid within the district. It was noted that the military aid provided sufficient resources to ensure sandbags could be deployed in a timely manner.

Councillor Paul Bryant asked whether sandbags were an effective method of flood prevention. Carolyn Richardson stated that the national guidance regarding flood prevention measure rated that sandbags were less effective than other Property Level Protection measures.

In response to questions asked about the allocation of sandbags, Carolyn Richardson advised that the SCG established one of two Strategic Sandbag Cells for the Thames Valley area at the Chieveley Depot. With the support of army, navy and RAF the depot was used as the base to receive, fill and distribute sandbags. There was a number of sandbags unused which was later recycled. Due to the demand for sandbags and scale of the event, the Council was required to request bags via the SCG before they could be removed from the sandbag cell. Carolyn Richardson advised that the concept was developed as the incident developed and in response to the national level of demand for sandbags. The concept of a Resource Centre would be an item of interest to the TVLRF going forward.

The Commission heard that through the debrief process, it became apparent that some communities were unaware of their responsibility to protect their own homes. Carolyn Richardson referred to statements contained within the residents' survey which suggested that the majority of respondents felt it was the responsibility of the Council to remediate. Carolyn Richardson stated that rural communities were more likely to work together and collectively problem solve than urban communities. Similarly, communities who had experienced flooding in the past were more likely to hold an emergency plan and therefore more likely to be prepared to respond.

Central Government had introduced various financial schemes to assist with the process of recovery and longer term flood prevention for affected residents and business. Carolyn Richardson advised that the Repair and Renewal Grant offered up to £5000 towards PLP measures if a property had internally flooded between December 2013 and March 2014. To date the Council had received 46 applications, of which 12 had been paid and 5 rejected. Applicants were encouraged to consider a joint application if a flood prevention

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scheme could benefit multiple properties, Carolyn Richardson advised that one scheme was underway in Streatley with the support of Stuart Clark.

The Commission thanked Carolyn Richardson for her presentation. Councillor Bedwell asked the Members to consider the recommendations contained within Carolyn Richardson's report and identify where the Commission might offer additional support.

Customer Services

Sean Anderson summarised the performance of the Customer Contact Centre and his experience as Controller in the EOC.

The Customer Contact Team consisted of experienced staff who provided prompt and informative responses to incoming calls. The team worked in close proximity to the EOC which strengthened communication and existing working relationships with Council Officers. These were pivotal in escalating actions and requesting updates.

Prior to the full activation of the EOC the Civil Contingency team established a mini EOC in the Customer Contact Centre which strengthened communication immediately. The team were experienced in such events and therefore knowledgeable about the local geography and how to manage incoming calls effectively. The team performed well and provided an essential function in the management of the flow of information.

Sean Anderson stated that he had been an EOC controller on numerous occasions during various incidents managed by the Council. Sean Anderson advised that whilst working in the EOC he had experienced a variation of handover styles and information cascade which impacted on the efficiency of the EOC at times. Often this was relative to the experience of the staff in the EOC. If a broader range of staff received training then inconsistencies would be addressed.

Sean Anderson concluded by stating that he felt the performance of the EOC was very good overall.

Councillor Roger Hunneman asked why the Contact Centre closed at 19:00 each day as he presumed there was a demand by residents to contact the Council irrespective of time of day. Sean Anderson advised that the contact lines remained open past 19:00 but filtered to the out of hours contact centre. Residents contacted the Council predominantly in the morning and demand decreased in the evening. If the out of hour's service received a call which required urgent attention then they contacted the EOC direct with details of the call.

In response to questions asked, Sean Anderson provided the following information

- It was not necessary, in his opinion, for roles within the EOC to be aligned to Officer grades. The roles required certain personal attributes and it would be advantageous if the staffing of the EOC considered suitability rather than grade alone.
- Customer Centre staff received EOC training through involvement with recent Emergency planning exercises.
- The Customer Centre prioritised tasks during the incident to ensure all Council services remained operational. Managing capacity within the service was challenging but managed efficiently.
- Customer Centre staff had sufficient equipment and resources to complete their assigned tasks.

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- The Customer Centre used a telephony system to filter calls according to their nature which enabled prioritisation of tasks and allocating resources within the service.
- Callers could request a call back to avoid long waiting times.
- The customer service experience was managed very well during the incident, interaction with the EOC was managed through a logging system.
- The Customer Centre experienced difficulties remaining abreast of recent information and advice as decided by the EOC or TCG. Communication could have been improved if a structure of briefings was in place.
- Staff worked endlessly to support the response, whilst there was no initial concerns with regards to the Working Time Directive, after two weeks it was apparent that staff found it challenging to maintain the same level of support.

Councillor Bedwell thanked Sean Anderson for his contribution towards the review and for his service's response to the severe weather.

Children's Services

Mark Evans advised the Commission that he would represent both Children's and Adults' Services. He proceeded to summarise the effects of the recent weather and performance of the Children's and Adult Services teams.

The Commission heard that the services were mainly affected by the demand on resources in order to support the EOC whilst maintaining critical services, e.g safeguarding. Overall the direct impact to service delivery and the vulnerable people receiving those services was minimal.

Using existing systems the EOC was able to access information to highlight vulnerable people known to the Council. The information enabled resources to be allocated and prioritised accordingly and, where necessary, for staff to proactively manage demand for special arrangements.

Councillor Bedwell asked how the service managed the notification of an elderly resident who may have been unable to leave their home as a result of the weather. Mark Evans advised that it was mostly the case that neighbours conducted regular checks and assisted with the provision of food and necessities. The Commission heard that it was difficult to know how many individuals required such support, especially if they were not known to the Council before the incident. Mark Evans explained that they supported any case where the Council was asked for assistance and the service regularly checked vulnerable people known to the Council.

Carolyn Richardson advised that the EOC had access to RAISE which contained information from Children's and Adult services. The team was therefore able to instantly check whether vulnerable people lived within affected areas. It was intended that in such circumstances agencies could create a composite list of vulnerable people within communities, however, consideration would be required to ensure information was managed correctly.

Carolyn Richardson advised that the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum had a Vulnerable People Plan which detailed the multi agency approach to preplanning and responses required when assisting vulnerable people. It was suggested that a specific version could be created for West Berkshire.

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In response to questions asked by the Commission, Mark Evans provided the following information

- Neither service had sufficient resources available to provide additional psychological support which might transpire as a result of the recent severe weather.
- Discussions were underway to create a Major Incident Support Team (MIST) within the Council. The team would focus on providing psychological support in the earlier stages of an incident. The Public Health Team coordinated the communication to schools and local GPs, which detailed the symptoms to look for and services available to support individuals.

Councillor Jeff Brooks thanked Mark Evans for his contribution and expressed his view that an Officer from Adult Services was required in order to fully understand the extent of the issue specifically in that service. Councillor Brooks wanted to know how many individuals in receipt of care packages had not been visited due to the conditions limiting travel to their home. He asked to know the attendance levels by carers during the course of the severe weather.

The Commission agreed that Adult Services would be re-invited in order that Members could discuss the service performance in more detail.

Councillor Brooks asked for more information on the Flood Bus which was introduced during the course of the severe weather. Carolyn Richardson advised that in response to demand for face to face communication between resident and agencies, the TCG instructed the coordination of two information buses. The buses, with representatives from responsible agencies on board to answer questions and hand out leaflets, visited affected communities. The information bus was created in reaction to demand and developed over the course of two visits, the method of communication was generally well received and an option to consider in the response to future incidents.

Councillor Brooks suggested that similar communications would have been beneficial for Members to receive. He suggested that if sufficient guidance was provided then Members could cascade the advice face to face within their communities. Carolyn Richardson acknowledged Councillor Brooks' suggestion and advised that Members were issued daily updates by email, however, it was possible that additional means of updates might add value.

Education - Schools

Mark Lewis summarised the effects of the recent weather and performance of schools in West Berkshire, rather than the impact on the Education Service.

The impact on schools overall had been minimal. The Commission heard that one school experienced a power surge due to the storms in December 2013. The storms highlighted a number of structural weaknesses within numerous schools, however, these were minor and did not require the schools to close. Surface water threatened schools but fortunately there were no reports of internal flooding. Mark Lewis advised that road closures or flooded roads caused issues with access to schools.

The Commission heard that the majority of schools had plans and processes in place to assist them in situations such as those experienced between December 2013 – March 2014. These included the Critical Incident Plan, Critical Incident Process and Severe

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Winter Weather Guidance, all of which were supported by the Critical Incident Team in West Berkshire Council.

Mark Lewis stated that following the 2007 floods and further heavy rainfall in 2008, schools sites that experienced flooding issues were assessed and a scheme of works developed where necessary and/or surface water drainage works undertaken. In particular, Aldermaston Primary School implemented Property Level Flood Protection measures and subsequently had not experienced flooding during recent severe weather.

Councillor Bedwell asked whether staff had experienced difficulty travelling to schools and therefore whether there were any cases of school closures due to a shortage of staff. Mark Lewis advised that the Critical Incident Team maintained regular communications with schools and there had been no cases that they had been made aware of.

Councillor Roger Hunneman made reference to comments within the report which suggested that the Critical Incident Team experienced difficulties communicating with the EOC. Mark Lewis explained that the information they required related to road closures which directly impacted access to schools. Information regarding duration and extent of the road closure was sometimes delayed or unknown. Mark Lewis acknowledged that the information was not always available to the EOC which caused some frustrations.

The response provided by the service consisted of the Critical Incident Team and regular communications with schools to support their decision making. Schools were reminded to refer to the plans and guidance in place. Mark Lewis advised that Officers visited numerous schools in order to make direct assessments where more targeted assistance was required.

The impact on service delivery was minimised by the use of the Critical Incident Team and having robust plans and processes in place, both of which were crucially supported by the experience of Officers and their willingness to work outside core working hours in order to maintain business as usual tasks.

There were limited recovery actions required due to the relatively low impact on schools, although a review of the plans and processes would be undertaken.

Councillor Webb asked whether every school had an Emergency Plan in place, Mark Lewis stated that the service requested a copy of each school's Emergency Plan and as yet they had yet to receive one for every school.

Highways and Transport

Mark Edwards and Jon Winstanly summarised the impact of recent weather experienced by the Highways and Transport teams.

Mark Edwards began by explaining that the response was challenging to the service and had been resource intensive. Engineers had been critical during all stages of the response investigating issues, reassuring communities and problem solving with innovative engineering solutions.

The service received 300 calls from the public in December, 900 in January and 1100 in February. Mark Edwards explained that the numbers were reflective of the deteriorating situation.

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During the course of the incident, engineers committed themselves fully to supporting the response, so much so that some Officer's were stood down in order to ensure their welfare.

Mark Edwards advised that neighbouring Local Authorities had been asked to place staff on standby, however, their assistance was not called upon. If the incident had continued past two weeks then additional resources would have been requested.

The two main areas of focus within the service were the flooding of properties and the deterioration of roads.

In response to questions asked by the Commission, Jon Winstanly and Mark Edwards advised the following:

- It was the responsibility of the Council to replace manhole covers if they posed a risk to the highway, irrespective of who owned the drain.
- Some residents lifted Thames Water manhole covers to allow surface water to drain into the network. In some cases the additional water in the system created significant issues elsewhere in the network, which in turn impacted communities and homes. It would be beneficial if communities were provided the information to better understand the impacts of such actions in order to minimise the effects.
- The highways drainage system was designed to cope with only rainfall landing on the highway. Between December to March the drainage systems were inundated with additional water draining from fields and rivers. The system was overwhelmed with water and therefore could not drain water away.
- It was not practicable to expect the highways drainage system to be redesigned to take excess volumes of water.
- As part of the Flood and Water Risk Management plan the service was in the process of creating and maintaining a register of flood risk assets. The list would include assets owned by the Council and third parties. The assets were fundamental elements of flood risk management and therefore required regular inspections and maintenance.
- The Asset Management Plan outlined the management of the highway network and was not to be confused with the Asset management register which listed flood assets only.
- Part of the Flood and Water Risk Management Act stated that planning applications must include plans for drainage. The F&WRMA was currently under review. Part of the proposed changes to the F&WRMA was that the Lead Local Flood Authority would be required to manage the drainage of any planning application where the development included more than two properties. The changes had not yet been introduced.
- The flooding experienced at Newbury train station was a direct result of a blockage in the Thames Water network which surcharged and infiltrated the highways network. Both Thames Water and Network Rail were continuing to investigate the issue and complete remedial work. The Council would also work with both agencies to ensure that the matter was resolved promptly.
- The Council used its existing contractors to manage resource demands, Volker's assisted with the deployment of sandbags as instructed by the Council.
- The Council continued in its efforts to establish the identity of owners of ditches and where possible serve notices to owners if they required clearing.

Councillor Brooks raised the issues experienced by residents in Lower Way, Thatcham. He explained that the road was closed due to significant sewage flooding, which

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presented a risk to public health, however, residents were inconvenienced by the closure which restricted access to their homes. A lack of communication with residents compounded the problem.

The Commission discussed the process for notifying communities about road closures and how Councillors could be an integral part of the communication cascade. Jon Winstanly advised that under the process for planned road closures communities would be informed in advance, unfortunately due the nature of the response and immediacy required, the Council was unable to communicate the closure in advance.

The Commission discussed the risks and challenges presented by drivers contravening road closures which had been put in place for public safety. The following points were raised throughout the discussion:

- The Highways and Transport should have signs prepared in advance to warn drivers and residents of the risks associated with the road closure and which may help them to understand why it is in place.
- Once a road closure was in place it was considered a formal road closure and therefore illegal to pass through. Some road closures were enforced by the police to ensure public safety was not compromised. Demand on resources, however, meant this was not possible in all cases.
- Information could be issued to the Parish Councils ahead of an incident advising them of the risks associated with driving through flood water and road closures. The information could be cascaded to residents through local newsletters.

Councillor Webb asked Officers to expand on the point within the report which suggested that communications within the EOC were challenging. Carolyn Richardson suggested that the comment was raised in reference to the initial stages of the EOC set up at which point multiagency representatives were positioned in the same room. The noise levels interfered with productivity and concentration. Carolyn Richardson stated that the issue resolved itself when the TCG was established.

Councillor Bedwell asked Jon Winstanly to explain the purpose of a Section 19 report. Jon Winstanly explained that under the F&WRMA the LLFA was required to conduct investigations into the causes of property flooding and issue recommendations for future prevention. Following the most recent floods, investigations had taken place across 20 Parishes and the draft reports had been issued to Parish Councils for their comments ahead of publication in September 2014.

In response to the level of demand placed on engineers during recent months it was discussed that the provision of support specialist advice was crucial. Councillor Brooks suggested that the team requested the assistance of neighbouring authorities if possible and also considered asking retired engineers for their assistance.

Mark Edwards advised that the service had completed phase one of a recovery programme along the highways network. Stage two included the repairs to a further 10-12 roads which would then conclude all works of the winter recovery programme. The planned works were in addition to normal business and road maintenance works.

Councillor Bedwell thanked Mark Edwards and Jon Winstanly for their contribution and commitment during the recent severe weather.

Recovery Working Group (RWG)

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June Graves summarised the impact of the severe weather on the Communities Directorate overall and advised that she would then explain the activities of the Recovery Working Group.

The Communities Directorate had played a significant role during recent events, providing key members of staff to the EOC and on standby to staff Rest Centres. The Housing team had been prepared for the eventuality of residents requiring urgent housing.

June Graves highlighted that there was a vast amount of experience within the Communities team derived from their involvement in previous incidents. Their experience ensured that key services remained operational and also contributed substantially towards the Council response.

In response to questions asked June graves advised that the list of vulnerable clients was readily available within the EOC. Welfare staff had access to RAISE which enabled instantaneous decision making.

June Graves described the progress of the Recovery Working Group. The Commission heard that the group had formed during the course of the response and as the immediate effects of severe weather in communities began to decrease. The RWG was created in accordance with the TV LRF recovery plan and was assisted by an Emergency Planning Officer from the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (as detailed within the Berkshire Memorandum of Understanding).

The structure of the group had been developed to ensure in detail to ensure maximum efficiency and provided integrated working within the Council. Once established the RWG was supported by subgroups which reflected of the demands and priorities for recovery. These were:

- Communication
- Public Health and Wellbeing
- Environment and infrastructure
- Finance
- Resources

The RWG received support from the Heads of Service and had achieved full attendance from those Officers required.

The wider recovery structure consisted of a Berkshire RWG and TV LRF RWG. June Graves advised that the Berkshire RWG was chaired by the CEO at RBWM and held weekly meetings/teleconferences to ensure consistency across Local Authorities on the health advice provided to communities, the process for removal of sandbags and administration of various grants.

Over time the need to conduct weekly Berkshire RWG meetings had diminished as Local Authorities recovered at different stages. June Graves advised that West Berkshire and RBWM had been required to continue their respective recovery efforts due to the extent of the effects they had experienced. Over time the necessity to refer issues to the Berkshire RWG had ceased.

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The West Berkshire RWG was an effective mechanism to co-ordinate the Council's recovery effort. The group used an action log to keep track of items inherited or established through the course of the response phase, as well as to monitor newly identified recovery needs.

In response to questions asked by the Commission, June Graves provided the following information:

- There had been no cases of Gastroenteritis recorded by GP's as a result of the severe weather.
- Information to highlight the symptoms of longer term psychosocial effects was provided to GPs, schools and displayed on the Council website.
- The RWG invited Thames Water to meetings in order that actions could be tracked and progress closely monitored.
- June Graves visited Newport Road which had been highlighted as an area which required urgent attention in the process of recovery. Speaking to the residents had helped June Graves to understand the needs of the community and therefore consider remedial action.
- Coordinating the recovery in West Berkshire was challenging due to the wide area impacted and the number of rural communities which required attention.
- The total cost of the response has not yet been agreed. A submission had been raised and issued to DEFRA for their consideration.
- West Berkshire Council had been provided funding from Central Government to conduct complete recovery efforts in areas such as Public Rights of Way.
- The Council was required to submit details of financial commitments and monies released fortnightly. The reporting requirement would continue until March 2015.
- Sandbag recovery advice issued by the EA and Public Health England was contradictory which impacted on the ability of the Council to give advice to the public.
- The handover from the SCG to the RWG had been earlier than preferred as agencies locally were in the process of recovery. By definition, the SCG was no longer required to coordinate the response, however, West Berkshire continued to provide sandbags and portaloos beyond the SCG ceasing operation. It had been challenging to coordinate the response and recovery simultaneously, therefore the assistance of an EPO from RBWM was requested to support the earlier stages of recovery.

Councillor Bedwell thanked June Graves for her participation in the review and commitment during the Council's phases of response and recovery.

In response to final remarks made by the Commission, Carolyn Richardson advised the following:

- The analysis of survey data had taken a large amount of time but it was a crucial element of the debrief process which enabled the Council to better understand the impacts and lessons to be learnt to aid future planning and response.
- It was difficult to quantify the data in terms of the impacts across the entire district due to the number of responses. As, for instance, only 8 businesses had completed the survey.
- The feedback suggested that, in the main, the Council had managed the response well.
- It was evident that some communities understood the level of responsibility required to ensure their properties were suitably protected from risks such as flooding. It was acknowledged that a significant amount of work would be required to inform all residents and communities that they had a fundamental role in ensuring their property was protected.

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Councillor Bedwell thanked all Members and speaker their contribution.

(The meeting commenced at 11.00 am and closed at 4.00 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature