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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY, 5 SEPTEMBER 2014

Councillors Present: Brian Bedwell (Chairman), Jeff Brooks (Vice-Chairman), Sheila Ellison, Roger Hunneman, Alan Macro, Garth Simpson, Virginia von Celsing and Quentin Webb

Also Present: , Matt Anderson (Scottish and Southern Electric Power Distribution), Sarah Burchard (Thames Water), Matthew Hensby (Sovereign Housing Association), Katherine Dolman (Environment Agency), Lindsey Finch (Thames Valley Police), Sabine Furlong (Thames Valley Police), Nick Gessey (Sovereign Housing Association), Simon Hall, Matthew Hensby (Sovereign Housing Association), Maria Hilihy (Environment Agency), Alex Howison (Scottish and Southern Electric Power Distribution), Paul Jacques (Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service), David Lowe (Scrutiny & Partnerships Manager), Lieutenant Colonel PCE Mileham RA, Hilary Murgatroyd (Thames Water), Charlene Myers (Democratic Services Officer) and Barry Russell (Environment Agency)

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

Councillor(s) Absent:

PART I

33. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

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

Councillor Brian Bedwell welcomed the Commission and speakers to the review. He reminded attendees that the review sought to establish the effects of the severe weather experienced between December 2013 and March 2014 and then shape recommendations that would influence future responses. The Commission would not look to place blame on Agencies Council Services or Communities.

The review would give agencies the opportunities to discuss their emergency preparedness and the response provided as well as give their version on interagency working, mutual aid, business continuity management and the recovery and the lessons they had learnt.

Thames Valley Police (TVP)

Lindsey Finch (Interim Superintendent) Newbury Police Station provided the response on behalf of Thames Valley Police, she advised that she was the Deputy area Commander in February 2014.

Thames Valley Police received notification that West Berkshire Council had declared a Major Incident (MI) on Friday 7th February 2014. TVP representatives were then

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committed to the WBC EOC as the point of contact with TVP and to filter information within the organisation where appropriate.

The Gold Commander at TVP HeadQuarters was made aware of the WBC MI declaration and although initial assessments concluded that TVP would not be required to do the same, TVP later declared a MI on Sunday 9th February 2014. Following the declaration a multiagency Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) was established at Kidlington.

A full command and control structure was established, comprising of a multiagency Strategic Coordinating Group at Kidlington and a Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG) at West Berkshire Council Office, Newbury meeting the identified need to create a localised tactical command.

Lindsey Finch was the Silver Commander at the point of establishing the TCG, which was responsible for coordinating the multiagency response at a localised level, liaising with the TCG established in RB&WM and the SCG in Kidlington for joint management of resources and identification of priorities.

The TCG remained in operation for two weeks and coordinated:

- Resources to manage extensive road closures: in the most extreme circumstances road closures were out in place to avoid loss of life, they also limited the effects of bow waves which flooded nearby properties.
- Reassurance within communities: cascading messages within communities and helping residents to relocate household goods from the ground floor.
- Communications: selecting the media channels to be used to cascade messages and leaflet drops within communities.

In response to questions asked by the Commission, Lindsey Finch provided the following information regarding road closures in West Berkshire:

- There were multiple instances of drivers contravening formal road closures, placing themselves at risk and on occasion requiring rescue by RBFRS or TVP.
- Road closures were put in place to avoid drivers exacerbating the flood effects to nearby homes. Bow waves caused significant problems for homes adjacent to flooded roads.
- Prioritising the allocation of resources to oversee certain road closures was sometimes challenging. Consideration was given to the risk associated with drivers breaching the closure and the effect of bow waves. Roads that were particularly affected were:
 - A338, Wantage Road, Great Shefford
 - Bucklebury Ford
 - Lower Way, Thatcham
 - Marsh Beenham (Intermittent, dependant on water levels)
- The demand to supervise road closures placed a strain on TVP resources and had to be considered in conjunction with the resources required to continue normal business.
- TVP recorded the details of drivers who breached road closures, summons had been issued and further action would be taken, although the total number of prosecutions was not known.
- Whilst RBFRS concentrated on assigned duties to provide HPV's, TVP was often required to rescue stranded drivers without having specialist equipment.

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- Media channels were used to reinforce the risks associated with driving through flood water.

Due to the rural nature of West Berkshire, the SCG allocated additional 4x4 vehicles to assist with travel around the district. Staff also cancelled leave to support the manning of the TCG and SCG.

Lindsey Finch advised that overall the multiagency response had been effective, due in part to the early identification of the need to establish a robust decision making process within the TCG. She advised that a lack of attendance from the Environment Agency (EA) within the EOC hindered early decision making. Their advice would have been useful in guiding the allocation of resources and establishment of priorities. Lindsey Finch stressed that the TCG requested a representative from the EA a number of times and finally received a point of contact 3 days after the TCG had been activated. It was noted that a representative had been allocated to RBW&M although they had not declared a MI.

Councillor Bedwell asked whether TVP would be inclined to use the Council facilities again based upon the positive feedback received. Lindsey Finch advised that the site was selected as it was adjacent to the already established EOC and with IT already in place. Selection of the site for future TCG's would depend on the nature of the incident but the Council Offices could be considered as an option for future use.

Lindsey Finch advised that routine business continued alongside the flood response efforts, but that the number of reported crime during the period was significantly lower than usual.

Interoperability between responding agencies was assisted by the use of TVP radios. Sabine Furlong advised that they issued the military with TVP radios which allowed instantaneous contact/updates, provided tasking and avoided duplication of efforts. TVP held 40 radios for issue to partner agencies at short notice.

Councillor Hunneman asked whether TVP would address the demand to man road closures differently in the future. Lindsey Finch advised that in some situations 'hard closures' could be implemented to reinforce a closure. The barrier could not be moved which ensured that motorists adhered to the closure. It was difficult to use the approach in all cases due to the need to ensure Emergency Services access. Lindsey Finch suggested that in order to address the issue communities required educating about the risk to life, the effects on nearby homes of breaching closures and the legal implications. Sabine Furling advised that the issue was experienced nationally and was not a concern to West Berkshire alone. The topic was escalated to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) for advice on the messages which could be issued to the public. The Commission heard that agencies were awaiting advice on the insurance implications if a motor vehicle was stranded within a road closure. It was agreed that such information could deter drivers breaching the closure.

When Commission asked whether the Council could offer support to reinforce road closures, Lindsey Finch advised that she would be happy to explore opportunities going forward.

Councillor Webb asked for a summary of the impact experienced by local power outages and the threat of more occurrences during the period of storms. Lindsey Finch advised that the threat of power outages had posed a significant issue for responders. The initial

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challenges were caused by the lack of knowledge about local substations and therefore understanding pinch points within the district, areas which might require additional resources in order to maintain their operation had been limited.

Lindsey Finch provided the Commission with an example of a power outage in East Ilsley which was not highlighted to responders until residents had been without power for two days. Power supply was especially crucial in some cases, as the power was required to maintain water pumps.

The Commission heard that irrespective of the nature of any issue arising during an incident, it was the role of the police to coordinate the multi agency response as detailed within the Civil Contingency Act 2004.

In response to questions asked by the Commission, Lindsey Finch and Sabine Furlong provided the following information:

- The West Berkshire police response was supported by staff from neighbouring areas which enabled staff to rest and maintain normal policing activity. It was understood that not all staff knew the area well but all support offered was utilised to maximum effect.
- Additional support was provided through the allocation of Special Constables and TVP committed 1 Sergeant and 10 Officers specifically to the flood response. They remained in place until 24th February 2014, after which the team was scaled down to 1 Sergeant and 6 Officers until the beginning of March 2014.
- Support from TVP within the EOC was organised by placing experienced Police Sergeants as the point of contact.
- Staffing for the role of Silver Commander in the TCG was achieved through rotation of staff. Not all were experienced but overall the feedback regarding coordination and effectiveness was positive.
- The media should be utilised earlier to cascade messages regarding implications of breaching road closures. In the longer term the messages could help minimise the demand for resources to supervise closures at high risk locations.
- Obtaining sandbags was initially challenging, but when the Sandbag Cell was established accessibility improved.
- Increasing the provision of hard standing barriers would help the force to manage its resources more effectively.
- Longer term measures could be introduced to manage road closures in high risk areas, for instance through the introduction of a gate at the Bucklebury ford.
- Police patrols provided reassurance in communities and assisted with checks on vulnerable people whose details held by the Council and utility companies.
- The total cost of the flood response to TVP was not known and although a submission had been raised to recover costs through the Bellwin scheme, the details were not available.
- Mapping and local knowledge of previously affected areas was extremely helpful during the response and significantly contributed towards the deployment of strategic sandbag walls.
- There was no record of Officers experiencing radio reception difficulties whilst visiting communities within the district.

Councillor Bedwell thanked the Thames Valley Police for their commitment and support and for their participation in the Commission's review.

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS)

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Paul Jacques advised that the event saw the largest mobilisation of FRS equipment since World War II. Every available High Volume Pump (HVP) was utilised/mobilised nationally during the course of the response and Berkshire had been the largest recipient of Fire Rescue Service equipment.

RBFRS had established a 24/7 operations centre to support the flood response at a strategic level, supported by bronze command which was located in Newbury. Additional resources were obtained through Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) arrangements with FRS across the country. 38 of 42 FRS provided mutual aid in Berkshire.

Paul Jacques was the RBFRS representative present during the activation of the TCG in the west of Berkshire. Another TCG was established in the east of Berkshire to oversee the response to flooding in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. Paul Jacques stated that by comparison, the West Berkshire TCG was a model structure for command and control arrangements. The Commission heard that in the east of Berkshire the TCG was positioned away from the EOC which hindered communication. The position of the TCG was fundamental in ensuring tasking was not duplicated. Following comparison with West Berkshire, the east of Berkshire TCG followed a similar model and instantly improved communications and decision making. Paul Jacques advised that a crucial element of the TCG's success was ensuring it contained appropriate agency representatives.

The Commission heard that the TCG would have benefitted from the earlier representation from the EA. It was important that agencies in the TCG had the information required to deliver an effective, coordinated response. Decision making could be protracted and understanding the implications of decisions was made more challenging by missing or delayed information.

In response to questions asked by the Commission, Paul Jacques advised the following:

- The RBFRS main focus remained on operating BAU functions and ultimately preserving life.
- RBFRS resources that were deployed specifically for flooding related activities:
 - Pumps – including HVP
 - Generators
 - Outreach vehicles
 - Boat rescues
 - Water rescue crews
 - RBFRS also provided water safety cover to assist the military effort to secure the Kennet Canal breach (which had affected the Burghfield SSE site).
- Flood plans were in place within the TVLRF but they were considered to be generic and therefore work was in motion to consider preplanning within communities. A recommendation had been drafted through the RBFRS debrief report that Local Authorities should develop a plan for each flooded area, detailing the multiagency response and resources required.
- Decisions made within the TCG were often made reactively, with enhanced preplanning the response could have been more considered.
- Work was underway between the Council and RBFRS to develop a plan identifying locations for temporary flood alleviation structures using the knowledge gathered from earlier flood events. The plan would not replace Property Level Protection but could offer emergency service and engineering solutions to minimise flood risks.

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- The RFS had provided a HPV and 1.5 Kilometres of hose as directed by the TCG, to alleviate flooding in West Ilsley, East Ilsley and Compton. The military provided sandbag ramps over water hoses to enable residents to maintain access to properties.
- Drivers contravening road closures sometimes had resulted in emergency rescue which was resource intensive. Messages regarding driver safety were issued by RBFRS and other agencies in an attempt to minimise the number of emergency calls for assistance.
- The RBFRS debrief report would recommend that vehicles were adapted so that they could be used in deeper waters.

Environment Agency (EA)

Barry Russell, Operations Manager, explained that he was the lead for the EA in the Strategic Coordinating Group and was supported by Katherine Doman (Flood Risk Advisor).

The Commission heard that South East England received 220% above average rainfall over a prolonged period of time. Soil Moisture Deficit levels were lower the average from November onwards, which contributed towards the overall effect.

The Commission received comparative data collated from the 1894 and 1947 floods and the data recorded from the 2014 floods. Although the volume of rainfall received in 2014 was significantly higher, the prolonged period in which it fell meant that the reported number of flooded properties was lower. Barry Russell explained that 2013/2014 witnessed an unprecedented volume and duration of rainfall.

The EA opened the West Thames Area Incident Room (AIR) in Wallingford, Oxfordshire on 23rd December 2013. The AIR was operational for 46 days and staffed 24/7. Barry Russell stated that the scale and length of the incident tested the resilience of agency resources and staff. The EA requested inter-Regional Aid in order to meet the demand to attend SCGs', TCGs' and carry out operational tasks. In order to meet the required level of response, the EA enhanced their Flood Ambassador resource which enabled more face to face communication with partnership agencies and communities.

125 Ambassadors were sent to 95 locations during the Winter Floods, they supported the Council's Flood Bus through the provision of EA representatives and advisory material. The information collected through community visits was informed the AIR which in turn influenced response planning.

Barry Russell advised that 70 Flood Data Recorders (FDRs) were sent to over 100 locations to record internal and external property flooding levels during the Winter Floods. The Information was tracked by the AIR to help develop a picture of the flooding extent. The details would also help support the EA in the accuracy and timeliness of future Flood Warnings.

Using existing information flood knowledge the EA checked high risk areas in advance of river levels rising to make sure rivers were running freely. The EA deployed temporary defences, cleared blockages and worked with the military to move equipment and build barriers.

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As river levels rose in December, the Waterways staff responded by operating the Thames Weirs. The first weirs were fully opened on 19th December 2013 and the majority of weirs were subsequently opened by 24th December 2014. Barry Russell advised that between the start of January 2014 and the end of February 2014 the Thames Barrier was closed 43 times, of those, 39 were to alleviate the fluvial flooding upstream and 4 were to protect Central London from tidal flooding.

The EA issued their first news release on 23 December 2013, warning residents to be prepared for flooding across the West Thames area. More than 36 news releases were issued during the Winter Floods in a daily basis. The EA was integral in the process of warning people about flood risk from main rivers and sea, as well as managing the effects of flooding.

On 9th February 2014 the EA issued 14 Severe Weather Warnings (SFWs) for locations on the River Thames. The decision to issue SFWs was based on the forecasted rainfall and subsequent predictions that river levels would be higher than those in 2003 and potentially as high as those witnessed in 1947.

In response to questions asked by the Commission, representatives from the EA provided the following information:

- Normal operations were impacted by the required level of response, the Business Continuity Plan was invoked in order to prioritise services and resources. In some respects BCM arrangements continued due to the extent of the impacts.
- Debriefs had taken place and learning would contribute towards future planning and exercising. Preplanning with partner agencies enhanced preparedness and paid dividends during the course of the response.
- The function of the Thames Barrier was to control the effects of East Coast surges and incoming tides, to alleviate river levels upstream at periods of low tide and hold back water upstream at periods of high tide before reopening the gates to alleviate levels.
- EA staff was assigned to support the East TCG as a priority due to the forecasted impacts downstream, ideally the EA would have attended both TCG's from the offset, but establishing the resource to do so was challenging. Overall EA attendance at Berkshire TCGs' was considered sufficient and timely, although if more resources were available then staff would have been available sooner.
- The EA had an extensive geographical area to cover which presented logistical challenges regarding movement and availability of staff.
- The EA expected that agencies and communities would react to the notification of an SFW but increasing availability of resources, remaining vigilance and review course of action
- The newly introduced Newbury Flood Alleviation Scheme worked well although it was acknowledged that some changes could be identified as a result of the Winter Weather. The scheme sought to protect against fluvial flooding and not surface water flooding.
- There was no capital schemes requested to fund flood alleviation measures in Shaw at this time. It was realised that management was required but work could be restricted by the nature of the chalk streams.
- Private owners of weirs along the River Kennet were often unsure who they should contact to obtain guidance regarding the management of the weir. The EA acknowledged that they were not certain how the weirs along the River Kennet should function.
- There was no further action available once weirs were fully opened.

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- The EA and LA worked with riparian owners to encourage effective management of their respective section along the water course. It was not the function of either agency to take over management.
- The EA worked closely with the Canal and River Trust to oversee management of the Kennet Canal.
- The media focused on the benefits of dredging, in particular during the course of the Somerset Levels Flooding. A study had been undertaken to consider the benefits of dredging the River Thames, it concluded that the river was self-scouring and therefore manual intervention would add limited value. Where advantageous, the EA silted tributaries of the River Thames.
- The EA policy regarding dredging had not changed following recent flooding. The process was resource intensive and not viable in current climates, in most cases the benefits of dredging was negligible.
- The recorded number of flooded properties reflected the information provided to the EA. Residents may have been deterred from notifying the EA due to the insurance implications if their property was formally recorded as flooded.
- Flood forums provided a useful mechanism to engage with communities and monitor developments in local areas.
- The flood wardens offered an invaluable service as local point of contact and opportunity to access local knowledge.

In response to questions asked regarding the effectiveness of sandbags, the EA advised the following:

- They were most effective when used at strategic level protection rather the property level protection
- They provided reassurance to communities, although provided false security and created hostile crowds in some cases as they fought for bags.
- They were challenging to recovery from communities in terms of logistics, man power and health advice.
- They were cheap and relatively easy to store in advance
- They failed to prevent groundwater flooding

Councillor Bedwell thanked the EA for their contribution towards the review and support during the recent winter weather.

Scottish and Southern Electric – Power Distribution Network (SSE PDN)

Alex Howison, Stakeholder Engagement Manager, explained that the organisation covered all electrical distribution equipment for the south of England and Scotland.

The Commission heard that the organisation had a mechanism for identifying events which could impact certain specific operations, that had been designated by OFGEM. During an average winter SSE could be expected to declare 3 or 4 Extreme Events. During the period between December 2013 and March 2014 SSE declared 37 Extreme Events.

In order to manage the response within SSE PDN they created a Storm control room in Portsmouth to coordinate staff, oversee staff welfare and the allocation of resources and equipment.

Following the presentation of flood issues in February 2014, SSE PDN had created a flood control room in Slough. Alex Howison explained that the control rooms were

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managed separately to one another but in hindsight they were required to share a lot of information and it may have been beneficial if they had shared a location.

Power supply was managed effectively and there were no prolonged periods of power outage during the severe weather. Alex Howison advised that the power distribution network had the ability to redirect power from alternative substations in order to maintain supply.

SSE PDN understood which substations were at risk from flood water or storms, and measures were in place to mitigate the risks through effective preplanning. Preplanning also enhanced the effectiveness of technical, internal responses.

External communications was managed by the flood control room, Alex Howison acknowledged that the control room had been overwhelmed with incoming intelligence and had struggled to provide information outwards. Further work would take place to review the effectiveness of SSE PDN communications, concentrating on delivering a better customer experience and issuing prompt communications to partner agencies.

In order to improve communications with Parish Councils and partner agencies SSE would establish a Customer and Communities Team. Their key focus would be to establish themselves as a point of contact for their area. They would develop a greater level of understanding of the community issues and needs which would be shared within the organisation, especially when a heightened level of response was required.

Alex Howison advised that they now understood the benefits of using local media to communicate with residents during prolonged outages and the sharing of information with Emergency Planning Officers and Emergency Services.

Subsequent to the management of any recent severe weather, SSE PSN had aligned its areas affected by power outages to be organised according to Local Authority Boundaries.

Alex Howison concluded by stating that he felt the SSE PDN response had been managed effectively, however, it was recognised throughout the organisation that their involvement had ceased as agencies transferred their focus onto recovery.

In response to questions asked by the Commission, Matt Anderson and Alex Howison advised the following:

- The West Berkshire local Distribution Depot was at Theale, secondary stations were position in Andover and Reading.
- During an Extreme Event the resources at a depot were coordinated through the Storm Control Room.
- It became clear that information gathered by engineers at the depot was not always relayed back to the Storm Control Room. Managing the flow of information and improving communication links would be addressed by SSE PDN.
- Communication with the WBC EOC was considered sufficient, however, going forward it would be preferable if the contact link between SSE PDN and partner agencies was from the local depot.
- SSE issued text messages to residents who had signed up to the alert service. The messages detailed expected durations of any outages so that alternative arrangements could be made by customers if necessary.

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- The response was supported by engineers from Scotland and contractors had been placed on standby. Additional resources could have been obtained through other distributors if necessary.
- Welfare of staff (including provision of overnight accommodation)was managed through the Storm Control Room.
- Substations remained operational during the course of storms and flooding, although localised issues were experienced when power lines were damaged due to fallen trees and a programme of Resilience Cuts had subsequently been developed to maintain areas at risk of interruption. The main focus was in areas adjacent to 30000 volt lines.
- SSE PDN held a list of vulnerable people which residents could sign up to voluntarily.
- SSE was lobbying alongside other providers to see that information could be shared between organisations during times of emergencies to ensure the vulnerable receive resources.

The Commission heard that there were 2 sites placed at high risk in West Berkshire: the distribution centre at Burghfield and the substation at Southcote. The Burghfield site experienced significant flooding in December 2012, following which measures were introduced to improve resilience on site. The site was threatened again in February 2014, at which point additional resources were requested from the Military via the TCG and in liaison with WBC.

Matt Anderson explained that the Burghfield site was responsible for providing 120,000 homes with power. SSE PDN had improved network resilience by interlinking the power supply between secondary sites and therefore the power, if required, could be redirected to minimise the impact on residents.

SSE depot site in Theale was flooded and the company was unable to use the facilities on site. In order to manage staff welfare, engineers' were relocated to an alternative depot.

Overall SSE was now focused on improving its communication with partners and residents. In addition they had a programme of works underway to maximise resilience of the PDN for future events.

Councillor Bedwell thanked Alex Howison and Matt Anderson for their participation and support during the recent severe weather response.

Thames Water (TW)

Hilary Murgatroyd summarised the view of events from the perspective of Thames Water. The Commission heard that the severe weather impacted the organisation from 23rd December 2013 when the sewage network was affected by rising water levels infiltrating the system.

In response to events, Thames Water attended 7 Strategic Coordinating Groups, one in each of the seven Local Resilience areas the company worked within. In addition Thames Water was requested to provide mutual aid to other water companies which had also been affected by the severe weather.

The response effort had placed a large strain on the organisation's resources that had been required to attend to operational matters and contribute towards strategic planning.

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In order to manage the demand and to ensure a local focus was maintained, managers were assigned roles that supported the flood response within defined and discrete areas.

Hilary Murgatroyd advised that of the 2500 Thames Water pumping stations, 900 were overwhelmed due to water ingress, 450 of which were out of operation completely. Thames Water committed 100 tankers to alleviate critical issues along the network.

The Commission heard that since 2013 Thames Water had changed their policy on the use of tankers. Tankers would be prioritised to areas where known faults had arisen. It was considered impractical to use tankers in locations where the system was completely overwhelmed with water.

Overall the response provided by Thames Water was considered successful, however, it was recognised that the organisation had had to adapt their response to meet demands during the course of the event. Internal communications were robust and the support provided by staff was admirable.

Thames Water recognised that external communications required further work. The information collated by operational staff was crucial for keeping customers and partner agencies up to date had not always been forthcoming. In order to address the gap in future, Thames Water would focus on establishing stronger customer relationships, cascading messages through local and national media channels. Pre-planning work was currently underway to improve communications.

Following the learning achieved during the response, the telephony system had been updated and the logging system enabled call handlers to establish common trends in specific geographical areas and to allocate resources to investigate. Hilary Murgatroyd explained that capacity was sometimes limited by the necessity to assign engineers to individual tasks. Going forward, the system would provide a holistic view of the issues experienced by residents in a single geographical area and resources could be assigned accordingly.

In response to questions asked, Thames Water provided the following information:

- The waste water network was designed so that a degree of water infiltration was expected, however, recent water ingress levels had overwhelmed the network.
- Work was underway to identify vulnerable sections of the pipe which would benefit from the application of sealant. Private networks leading from the Thames Water mains to properties might also benefit from sealant but such work would be the responsibility of the home owner.
- RBFRS equipment was not suitable for the pumping of effluent from the waste water network or pumping stations.
- It was recognised that more communication from Thames Water was required by communities and that many residents received conflicting advice or updates which left them feeling frustrated. Gaps in communication could have been managed earlier and efforts were underway to address this for the future.
- More staff could be assigned to the customer contact centre if the volume of calls to Thames Water increased significantly. Resources could not be requested from other organisations or agencies but sufficient internal training provided Thames Water with the flexibility to temporarily redeploy staff into call handling roles.
- The issue identified at Newbury train station had been investigated by Thames Water, the Council and Network Rail. The three agencies were working together to

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resolve the matter as soon as possible. The details of their investigation would be shared with the Commission.

- Portaloos were not provided by Thames Water due to the nature of the event. Thames Water assets were overwhelmed with ground water and surface water, neither of which reflected the performance capabilities of the network. The provision of portaloos therefore was not the responsibility of Thames Water.
- In order to prevent water infiltrating the network in future, work was underway to seal manhole covers in key locations. It was expected that if the volume of water infiltration was controlled then the impact on residents' facilities would be minimised.
- Surcharging could not be resolved by increasing the capacity of the network. Instead engineers would investigate how the water ingress could be minimised.
- If a treatment plant become overwhelmed due to water levels then Thames Water had dispensation not to treat a percentage of waste water received. The EA allowed Thames Water to discharge excess treated water into the environment if storage capacity was exceeded. If such an event were to occur then tests would take place to ensure that the treatment works were operating within regulated levels.
- Representation from Thames Water at the West Berkshire TCG and EOC had been limited by the availability of resources. The organisation covered a large geographical area and coordinating resources was challenging. In order to cope with demand across an expansive area Thames Water allocated a manager to each LRF, the arrangement improved contact and communications.

Councillor Bedwell thanked Hilary Murgatroyd, Sarah Burchard and Andrew Hagget for their contribution towards the review.

Sovereign Housing Association (SHA)

Matthew Hensby summarised the effects of the recent severe weather, as experienced by SHA.

The main focus through the course of the event was to provide support to residents and protect SHA assets. Of all Sovereign's housing the stock, the impact had been felt most severely in West Berkshire and Basingstoke.

In West Berkshire 2 properties had flooded internally and a further 7 residents had been re-housed. One resident was offered the opportunity to be relocated due to the effects that the weather had had on their property but they wished to remain in their home.

Sandbags were delivered to social housing properties at risk of flooding. SHA worked in conjunction with the Council to identify the need for and delivery of bags for properties adjacent to SHA properties also. Decommissioned properties were re-commissioned as contingency against the requirement for emergency re-housing.

SHA established their Emergency Plan on 10th February in response to the increased demand on resources and deteriorating weather conditions. The Health and Safety Team acted as the point of contact for the flood response within SHA, setting clear roles and responsibilities for the staff involved. Matthew Hensby advised that SHA felt the response had been managed effectively, however a review would take place to identify elements for improvement and to minimise the strain on services during future responses.

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Nick Gessey advised that he managed the SHA response via the activation of the Critical Incident Team, Business Continuity Management (BCM) and the disaster recovery effort. The Critical Incident Team were working 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at the peak of the SHA response and had been overseen by a SHA Silver Command. The two worst affected areas had been Buckskin in Basingstoke and Shaw in West Berkshire and tasks were prioritised by the Silver Command accordingly.

The coordination of activity with the West Berkshire Council EOC was effective and ensured that priority was given to the most vulnerable sites and local residents. Nick Gessey advised that the use of maps and knowledge of flood risks in the area had helped with the allocation of sandbags to residents.

Nick Gessey acknowledged that collaborative working with the West Berkshire Council EOC had been beneficial during the response, adding that SHA withdrew from joint working as agencies began to focus on recovery. SHA had subsequently determined that going forward it would provide support throughout the response and recovery phases.

Councillor Brian Bedwell invited the Neighbourhood Wardens to comment on the response provided by the team. The Commission received the following information:

- The team had worked tirelessly to assist residents but the response could have been managed more effectively if additional assistance had been available sooner.
- The team had access to Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and 4x4s to aid response.
- It would have been beneficial for some form of training on how to build an effective sandbag wall to have been provided prior to the arrival of the weather.
- Interaction with the EOC was frequent and informative. In response to the demand for regular updates neighbourhood wardens created a daily report containing local flood updates and photos which they then relayed back to the EOC.
- The team had adapted to the needs of the response. Shift patterns were altered in order to maximise working time during daylight hours and staff visited areas outside normal patrol routes to increase the assistance they could give to other agencies.
- SHA had recognised the benefits of placing an Officer in the EOC to make assessments based on the information immediately available.

Councillor Macro noted that SHA was only one of many social housing providers in the district. Carolyn Richardson agreed that work was required to link into all social housing providers, to pre plan together and to understand the capabilities and needs of each of the organisation and their tenants.

Carolyn Richardson asked whether SHA had identified a need for Property Level Protection following recent events. Matthew Hensby advised that work was underway in Purely to reinforce property boundaries which had previously allowed water to flow through fencing and threaten people's homes.

Councillor Brain Bedwell thanked SHA for their contribution and support. Matthew Hensby advised that SHA would collate the findings from their internal debrief and share the lessons learnt with the Council.

Military – Joint Regional Liaison Officer (JRLO)

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Lieutenant Colonel PCE Mileham RA advised that his role as JRLO was to act as the representative for the Ministry of Defence in the Hampshire and Isle of Wight LRF and Thames Valley LRF. He had been the initial point of contact for both LRFs during the recent severe weather. Lieutenant Colonel Mileham advised that, as defined within the Civil Contingency Act 2004, the Military was not considered as either a Category One or Category Two responder and therefore was not bound to the same duties.

The Commission heard that the situation was being managed effectively by agencies but when, on 7th February, forecasts suggested that the weather conditions would deteriorate rapidly, West Berkshire Council declared a Major Incident. In anticipation that additional resources might be required through a Military Assistance to Civil Authorities (MACA) tasking, 7 Rifles was redirected to West Berkshire.

Initially military aid was provided to minimise the threat presented by flood water at a Scottish and Southern Power Distribution Site in Burghfield. Sandbags walls were built to secure a breach identified along the Kennet Canal.

In response to questions asked by the Commission, Lieutenant Colonel Mileham advised the following:

- Although MACA provided a clearly process for the activation of military aid, Joint Doctrine also allowed for a rapid mobilisation, through the authorisation of the local Brigade Commander, in circumstances such as those in evidence at Burghfield.
- Hampshire had suffered similar effects to West Berkshire and, in his opinion, they too should have declared a Major Incident. It was preferable to declare a MI at an earlier stage and scale back if necessary rather than leave it too late and have to provide assistance in haste.
- Initially military staff had limited access to suitable PPE, therefore the safety of staff was overseen by RBFRS. During the course of the response the MoD purchased waders, throw lines, life jackets and wellington boots.
- The level of military aid was increased following a visit to Wraysbury by the Secretary of State for Defence. The scale of the disruption and damage caused by the severe weather was made evident to him and consequently a further 15 Army, Navy and RAF units were deployed to assist with the response efforts.
- Military decision making was delegated to the lowest appropriate level in order to maximise effectiveness. Throughout the course of the MACA period, the local Commander was provided sufficient authority to agree tasking which in turn ensured a prompt response.
- Military aid assisted communities by moving furniture away from flood water, building sandbag walls and general reassurance tasks as assigned by the local TCG.

Councillor Hunneman asked for more detail on the involvement of the military in the build up to an incident and prior to the declaration of a MI. Lieutenant Colonel Mileham advised that as JRLO he would be invited to join all LRF teleconferences.

The Commission heard how the Military was tasked with the deployment of sandbags and developing the store at Chieveley Depot. Lieutenant Colonel Mileham stated that the availability of sandbags quickly became an issue as demand increased rapidly. The Council's Chieveley depot was designated as a Sand Bag Cell and was used as one of two strategic locations in Thames Valley to receive, store and distribute sandbags. The scale of the demand for and distribution of sandbags made the military aid for the delivery of these tasks crucial. Lieutenant Colonel Mileham observed that sandbags

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offered reassurance within communities but agreed that responsibility for the protection of properties rested with the homeowner.

Due to the weight of material and limited suitability of assets from statutory responders, a national supermarket chain offered its lorries as transport for the sandbags. Councillor Macro suggested that it would be useful to have a national list of assets which could be utilised to transport sandbags.

The Commission heard that the sandbag cell had been managed by the Resource Cell in Kildlington and staffed by the military and Volkers. A large number of sandbags were left at the depot when the response phase had ended and it had taken an inordinate amount of time to remove them during the recovery phase. It was likely that the number of sandbags required would need to be reviewed along with the Council Sandbag Policy.

Lieutenant Colonel Mileham advised that the Military was in the process of restructuring but that a key focus would continue to be homeland protection. Civil protection units would be created to link in with Local Authorities to provide localised contacts and stronger working relationships

Councillor Bedwell thanked Lieutenant Colonel Mileham for his participation in the review and support offered by the forces during recent severe weather.

(The meeting commenced at 9.00 am and closed at 4.15 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature