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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 11 SEPTEMBER 2014

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

Also Present: Stuart Clark (Principal Engineer (Projects)), Carolyn Richardson (Civil Contingencies Manager) and Stephen Stace, Brian Connorton, Kay Lacey, David Lowe (Scrutiny & Partnerships Manager), Charlene Myers (Democratic Services Officer) and Mark Richardson

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

PART I

35. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received

36. **Severe Winter Weather 2013/2014**

Councillor Brian Bedwell welcomed Members to the third meeting of the Severe Weather review. Members were advised that the meeting scheduled for 15th September 2014 would be cancelled in order that Officers could collate the notes from previous meetings and form a report ahead for Members to consider. David Lowe advised that the draft report would be issued to Members for consideration on 23rd September and subsequently discussed at the meeting on 30th September 2014.

Councillor Bedwell welcomed Carolyn Richardson and Stuart Clark to the review and asked that them to provide information on:

- The community self-help model
- Public understanding
- The debrief survey results

Carolyn Richardson explained that the community self-help model relied on community spirit to enhance resilience. The model had been developed since the flood event in 2007, when agency resources had been limited and collaborative working with residents was crucial. The Council provided Emergency Plan templates to Parish Councils and specific areas where risks had been identified. The template was developed to aid community resilience planning. Carolyn Richardson also held workshops if additional advice was required.

The Commission heard that strengthening community resilience was a slow process. Often the most engaged communities were those who had experienced an incident in the past and therefore realised the potential for reoccurrences. Community planning was beneficial as often the local residents had the local knowledge to identify risks and consider solutions.

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In order to increase community engagement and enhance resilience planning agencies visited communities direct and helped establish Flood Wardens who acted as the main point of contact for their respective communities.

Carolyn Richardson explained that flood wardens were often relied upon by agencies and communities. As it was most often the case that the flood warden volunteers were also members of the Parish Council or of other volunteer groups, their availability was sometimes restricted. More significantly, flood wardens sometimes suffered from their properties flooding, which caused them immense personal pressure and stress.

Overall the community self-help model was successful if agencies and communities worked together. This had evident where Flood Forums had been established. Carolyn Richardson advised that Flood Forums had been set up in the Lambourn Valley, Pang Valley, Newbury, Thatcham, Streatley and Purley. With the input from agencies, the forums produced and then monitored action plans to address flood risk.

In general, rural communities were more engaged with their local Flood Forum than were urban communities and consequently had a better understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities of home owners and agencies. Council survey results had highlighted that well established flood forums provided more focused suggestions for future flood responses. They had a higher portion of residents registered to receive the Environment Agency flood line alerts and warnings.

It was still apparent that public understanding varied across communities. Carolyn Richardson referred to the local residents' survey results which concluded that the majority of respondents believed it was the responsibility of the Council to protect household properties. It appeared that residents were aware of potential risks but required explicit instructions from agencies before they would consider mitigation measures.

Councillor Hunneman suggested that the volunteer flood warden groups could be extended as points of contact for wider resilience issues. Carolyn Richardson concurred, stating that work was underway to enhance the remit of flood wardens.

Amplifying the points raised by Carolyn Richardson, Stuart Clark advised that residents appeared to expect that the Council and EA would eliminate flood risks even though neither agency had a duty or received funding to do so. Stuart Clark suggested that home owners needed to consider long term mitigation measures. This was especially so if they lived adjacent to a watercourse, but was also necessary in areas which suffered from ground water and surface water flooding.

Advice had been issued to communities in the past and work was underway to continue the provision of home owner preparedness messages in the future. However, Stuart Clark stated that how the advice was received depended on residents' recognition and acceptance of the risks. It was suggested that communities at higher risk should be targeted for support and action in the shorter term.

In response to questions asked by the Commission, Stuart Clark and Carolyn Richardson advised the following:

- Flood resilience messages were most successful when delivered through face to face communications in communities i.e at flood events and meetings.

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- No two flood events were the same, and the tailoring of messages about preparedness and the development of agency schemes to minimise flood impacts were challenging. As an example, the flood alleviation scheme introduced in Thatcham had been designed to protect against a 1 in 100 year flood event but, as the recent severe weather (considered to be a 1 in 250 year flood event) had demonstrated, the risk of flooding would never be entirely eliminated.
- Parish Councils provided a good means of communicating with communities and messages had been issued through them between December 2013 and June 2014. Not all Parish Councils however had passed on to residents the information that they had received.
- A communication strategy specifically focusing on the needs to inform the public on flood risks was considered to be hugely beneficial.

Carolyn Richardson highlighted the following key points from the surveys that had been carried out by the Council:

- The survey invited businesses, residents, flood wardens, Members and Parish Councils to comment on the response provided by the Council and sought their views on self-help.
- 229 residents contributed towards the debrief (3.5% of the West Berkshire population)
- 6 Business contributed provided their feedback which was considered to be a very small portion of the businesses impacted during the recent severe weather.
- The main findings from the results were;
 - The public had a reasonable understanding of the various flood types, how they believed they were affected and the response required
 - There was evidence of psychological impacts
 - Preplanning was inconsistent across communities – some prepared plans in advance whilst others reacted to events without any form of preplanning. There was an evident need to educate communities about the benefits of preplanning.
 - 55% of residents said they had signed up to the EA Floodline which was not consistent with the number reported by the EA. It was possible that the statistics used by the EA contained historical information from previous homeowners which suggested that more work was required to encourage new home owners to sign up to the Floodline alerts system.
 - There was a need to review the process through which homeowners registered themselves to received alerts and updates from utilities companies.
 - The perceived level of responsibility for recovery of resources such as sandbags varied considerably between communities.
 - Local community groups shared information through the use of social media groups. If it were to participate in these local groups, the Council would be able to pass updates to residents instantaneously.
 - 24% of responders said they would be happy to volunteer their time and assist with the response during future events.
 - There was evidence that the roles and responsibilities were not fully understood by respondents, which then caused a mis-match in expectations for response. Specifically, whilst 79% of residents suggested that the Council could improve its response, 55% of residents stated that they would not change their own response.
 - The Parish and Town Council feedback highlighted that they had a clearer understanding of the response effort required and the roles and responsibilities of agencies and home owners. They had provided feasible and realistic suggestions for future improvements.

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- The business survey results suggested that there was a gap in the understanding and utilisation of Business Continuity Management plans and that the business community might benefit from further education and advice.

Carolyn Richardson highlighted the following key that might be taken forward:

1. Promotion to residents of the benefits of signing up to Floodline, the implementation of Property Level Protection and the provision of education about the respective roles and responsibilities of home owners and agencies.
2. Use of local social media groups, contact centres, the Council website and Liaison Officers to communicate with communities and individual residents.
3. Encouragement of pre-planning to enhance resilience within communities through the promotion of the Emergency Plan template, expanding the remit of flood wardens, encouraging more volunteers to come forward and the promotion of BCM to the business community.
4. Review of agencies procedures for:
 - Managing road closures
 - The use of sandbags
 - Communications issued by agencies and utility companies.
 - Understanding the implications around existing development control guidelines to aid property resilience.

Stuart Clark advised that the Council had recently contacted Parish Councils and asked them to identify the roads that had been affected by flooding. The information received would be used to consider response solutions that might minimise future adverse effects on drivers or determine whether there was a need for permanent signage.

Councillor Bedwell asked who would be responsible for providing PLP measure if an applicant for development was granted permission in a known flood risk area and was informed in response that it would remain the responsibility of the home owner or developer. Stuart Clark advised that the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) stated that development should be avoided in flood risk areas, or where unavoidable, suitable measures should be taken to mitigate the risks. It was stated that the developer's flood risk assessment should take such matters into account.

Councillor Hunneman highlighted the issues experienced by residents in Shaw, specifically where drainage networks linked to the river. He suggested that non-return valves could have avoided much of the flooding. Stuart Clark agreed and stated that schemes could be revisited after implementation if changes were required.

The following points were raised during further discussion;

- The Council sandbag policy was being adhered to until Central Government direction authorised the supply of all necessary resources to prevent further disruption. Despite this, the Council's policy remains that it will not supply sandbags unless the resident is deemed vulnerable or the property is at imminent risk of flooding.
- Communications regarding flood resilience and preparations for the coming winter would be issued to communities shortly.
- Homeowners could purchase more resilient material to protect their home from builders' merchants. They were however noticeably more expensive than conventional materials.

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- Thames Water was often consulted during the planning process and rarely objected to an application.
- The Local Flood Risk Strategy did not address communications for flood awareness and incident updates. A separate communications strategy or plan was consequently required.
- There was no duty under the Highways Act for local authorities to maintain access to roads that had been flooded and if West Berkshire Council were expected to do so there would be financial implications. Any determination for the carrying out of such work would be made on the basis of risk and benefit.
- Residents were frustrated by the difficulties they faced trying to obtain updates from agencies over the phone. Residents often contacted the Council due to them not knowing which agency they needed to contact. It was suggested that the Council could enhance the service of the Customer Centre during an incident by providing callers with updates issued to them by other agencies.

Councillor Bedwell thanked Stuart Clark and Carolyn Richardson for their presentation and support during the recent severe weather event.

Adult Social Care

Following the request made by Members at the meeting on 1st September 2014 the Adult Social Care Service was invited back to the Commission to provide a more detailed account of the impacts it had faced during the course of the severe weather.

Stephen Stace proceeded to explain that he represented the service on behalf of Tandra Forster who was unable to make the meeting. He would provide information regarding the impact experienced by the service, vulnerable adults and his own experience of the EOC function.

Stephen Stace advised that overall the impact upon vulnerable adults had been minimal, although there were sporadic instances across the district where care homes had had to activate contingency plans or consider alternative locations for residents. Stephen Stace informed the Commission that at Aliceby Court the roof had leaked into 4 flats. As the provider had not had a BCM plan available, the Council was required to assist the landlord through the provision of alternative accommodation for 4 residents.

Most providers did however have BCM plans in place and such details were checked through the assessments conducted by the Care Quality Commission.

There was an instance where care workers had experienced difficulties accessing a domiciliary care user due to the deterioration of the entrance road. Consequently the resident was moved to ensure that their care arrangements could be delivered.

The service supported a sheltered housing scheme which had had significant levels of water in the car park and which had also threatened some of its ground floor flats. The Council established a rest centre at the Phoenix Centre where 3 residents resided for 48 hours, until alternative arrangements could be made by the landlord.

Stephen Stace advised that incidents were managed swiftly and efficiently, however the service should have activated the BCM plan as the requirement to maintain core operations whilst simultaneously supporting the flood response had placed a strain on staff and other resources.

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In response to questions asked by the commission Stephen Stace advised the following:

- The service and EOC used RAISE to identify vulnerable people receiving care packages commissioned by the Council. Using the information, daily welfare checks were conducted by staff in those areas affected by the weather.
- The service was keen to expand the list of vulnerable people during an incident to include the details recorded by other agencies. It was however appreciated that Data Protection laws meant that any mechanism that might be introduced must have had thorough consideration.
- The Council held a list of establishments across the district which could be used as rest centres. Factors such as the facilities required and the number of people requiring temporary accommodation determined which rest centres would be activated.
- If specialist accommodation was required then mutual aid arrangements could be requested from other care homes providers, either locally or outside the district.
- While resources could be directed to assist people in receipt of care, the Council would not know about residents with independent care arrangements who might also need attention.
- Willow's Edge care home had been under threat of flooding due to the encroaching water from the River Lambourn. They had used sandbags to construct a barrier around the boundary of the site and considered the period of time required to evacuate the home if necessary. The situation was monitored closely by staff at the care home and Council Officers. Since then the site had considered work to prevent significant disruption in the future.
- The service had been aware of those instances where carers had been unable to visit residents. The service had rearranged visits (via other carers) or considered alternative accommodation if the issue related to accessing the home.
- Adult Social Care staff would benefit from EOC training to help them understand the duties involved with the various roles.
- The rota for visits to recipients of care packages was overseen by the service. Where necessary hours were altered to ensure adequate cover and contingency. Carers had access to 4x4 vehicles following lessons that had been learnt during previous weather events.
- Additional 4x4 transport could be requested through the Transport Team. Vehicles were placed on standby for Officers to use if the Council was responding to an incident.
- Welfare checks often identified residents who had self evacuated. Recognising that it might have been beneficial if the clients had contacted the Council in advance, to avoid unnecessary visits or the heightening of concerns if the Council was unable to reach them, there was not a great deal that could be done about it.

The Commission discussed the challenges faced by displacing vulnerable clients. The review in 2007 established that the police would not have the powers to remove someone from their home if they did not want to leave. Stephen Stace advised that he was aware of some cases where residents had wished to remain in the home regardless of the risk.

Councillor Bedwell thanked Stephen Stace for his contribution towards the review and support during the response.

The Commission asked Carolyn Richardson whether she felt the Council had sufficient resources to cope with transportation around the district and for assessments of the area.

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Carolyn Richardson advised that the Transport Team allocated 2 4x4 vehicles for the EOC which did limit the opportunity for community visits. If necessary however the Council could approach other agencies or voluntary organisations to request additional transport.

The Commission discussed the use of a drone during flood events. It was stated that Thames Valley Police and the military had used aerial assessments to understand the how the situation was developing and they had proved extremely useful. It was agreed that need to have similar resources available should be explored, with questions on which agency might purchase and maintain any remotely controlled vehicle to be addressed at a later stage.

Councillor Simpson asked whether thought had been given towards the use of caravan parks as accommodation for displaced residents. Carolyn Richardson stated that the option might be appropriate for a displaced community and would be considered. The majority of residents appeared to have insurance, therefore, accommodation would be arranged through their providers.

Community

Councillor Bedwell invited local residents to provide their comments on the impacts of the severe weather on their communities and the responses provided by themselves, the Council and others.

Mark Richardson (East Ilsley) began by explaining that 6 homes in East Ilsley had been evacuated due to internal flooding and that ground water, surface water and sewage had threatened many properties in West Ilsley, East Ilsley and Compton. The most severe case of sewage flooding had been experienced in West Ilsley causing a loss of facilities and a reliance on portaloos that had lasted for 4 weeks.

Mark Richardson advised that the agency response was overall relatively good and the military aid had provided reassurance in communities, he believed however that residents felt the joint response could have been more effective. Mark Richardson provided the example of RBFRS resources being allocated to the Pang Valley to alleviate the flood risk from West Ilsley further down the valley. He stated that the methodology was misguided as the positioning of equipment had offered limited relief and failed to improve the situation. The process of transporting water through a series of High Volume Pumps down the Pang Valley had failed to address the need to increase volumes of water as it was moved further down the valley. The process had only maintained water levels at the lower locations, it had not reduced them. Furthermore, RBFRS did not have sufficient equipment to position the HPV in the correct location.

Residents felt that their comments regarding the suitable location of equipment had been ignored and subsequently agencies had implemented solutions which offered little benefit. Mark Richardson stressed that the assistance provided by RBFRS helped maintain the situation and residents appreciated their efforts, however, it was ashamed that they were unable to position the resource where it was needed most.

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Mark Richardson suggested that in future flood alleviation measures might be considered alongside Abingdon Road which was the area most affected by water travelling downstream from West Ilsley.

Communication from the Council during the incident was frequent and informative. The daily emails had aided planning and provided an appreciation for the situation across the district.

Flood Forums were now continuing to monitor progress against identified actions which had been assigned to agencies. The group acted as a pressure group for local communities which agency representatives also attended. Mark Richardson stated that the Parish Council was responsible for creating the Emergency Plan and the Flood Forum monitored the progress of the action plan.

Residents were frustrated with the lack of updates being provided by agencies to and through the Flood Forum. He was aware of some remedial work underway to address areas highlighted during the floods but was disappointed that agencies had failed to share the details with communities.

Kay Lacey (Pangbourne) advised that Thames Water had agreed to send to the Flood Forum the reports arising from their investigations but as yet the information had not materialised. A direct contact had recently been assigned to the Pang Valley and it was anticipated that contact between the Parish Councils and Thames Water would now improve.

Councillor Hunneman asked for the community's opinion on the effectiveness of sandbags. Kay Lacey stated that residents expected sandbags to be delivered as they had been offered in the past. Sandbags were most effective as a tool for community reassurance rather than as a flood prevention measure. Kay Lacey advised that the effectiveness of sandbags was questionable however the media depicted flood response through images of sandbags being deployed. This raised both demand and expectation in communities. However, any form of temporary measure was only useful if the event enabled sufficient time for resources to be deployed. Kay Lacey stressed that flood levels had risen slowly and had therefore provided an opportunity for residents to consider action, which might not be the case in the future. Carolyn Richardson reinforced the benefits of residents considering Property Level Protection measures.

It was agreed that storing flood prevention equipment would be beneficial as it was often difficult to obtain resources during the course due to the demand of competing communities. As sandbags were known to deteriorate relatively quickly, a sound method of managing the storage of them was proving difficult to find, although polypropylene bags had a longer lifespan.

David Lowe asked whether it was the perception of residents that the responsibility to protect homes rested with agencies rather than home owners. Mark Richardson advised that in many cases home owners were still waiting for insurance companies to agree remedial work before they could consider additional protection measures. The Commission heard that many residents understood that they had a responsibility as home owners to protect their own property. It was noted however that the survey results considered earlier in the meeting had indicated that the understanding was far from universal.

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Kay Lacey advised that the Flood Forum promoted the Repair and Renewal Grant which offered funding for the implementation of PLP. The Commission recognised that residents in rural areas had made significantly more effort to protect their homes before the most recent event than had those in urban areas.

Brian Connerton (Standford Dingley) stated that he agreed with the comments made on the desirability of storing flood alleviation equipment and the need to consider the durability of sandbags. He stated that Standford Dingley had been affected during the 2007 floods and that subsequently a significant amount of work had been undertaken to protect properties. He believed that homeowners in Standford Dingley understood their responsibilities.

Brian Connerton explained that the main issues experienced in Standford Dingley related to the impacts from sewage, specifically the lack of maintenance of a local Thames Water pumping station. Following the severe weather incident, Thames Water had initiated work to remediate the issue but since then the project coordinator had moved roles. The lack of consistency raised concerns for residents that the issue would not be addressed.

Brain Connerton fully supported the work of Thames Water to introduce a single point of contact. He was complimentary of the response provided by the Council.

The Commission explored the desirability of a central resource store. The following points were raised:

- They required time to establish and therefore if the incident occurred with little or no warning then the arrangement would fail.
- The distribution of sandbags required that suitable vehicles were available within the community.
- Sandbag distribution was resource intensive and during the recent severe weather the activity had been heavily reliant on manpower from the military.
- Pumps and airbrick covers would also be required.
- Each community had different issues which required different resources.
- The responsibility for the management of stores was unclear.
- The proper identification of strategic flood prevention store locations could minimise equipment deployment time and the people required to build flood defences.

The Commission concluded the discussion by agreeing the benefits of promoting the Repair and Renewal Grant to enhance accessibility to PLP. This would also help to educate communities of the benefits of PLP. Educating the public might be achieved through the use of appropriate trained technicians or specialists.

Councillor Bedwell thanked Kay Lacey, Brian Connerton and Mark Richardson for their feedback and contribution to the review.

Councillor Bedwell advised that the draft recommendations would be considered by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Commission ahead of their publication on 23rd September. Members were invited to submit their recommendations in advance. The final report would be discussed and agreed on 30th September 2014. Carolyn Richardson also welcomed comments from the Commission on the Flood Debrief Report which would be updated to reflect the points raised during the course of the review.

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(The meeting commenced at 1.30 pm and closed at 5.30 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature