

**FLOODING SCRUTINY PANEL
16TH APRIL 2024**

PRESENT: The Chair (Councillor Harper-Davies)
Councillors Bottomley, Goode, Haynes and
Maynard

Head of Contracts, Leisure, Waste and
Environment
Democratic Services Officer (NC)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Matthews

Due to availability of rooms and technical issues with the sound recording device this meeting was not recorded.

7. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 12th March 2024 were confirmed as a correct record with the following amendment as requested by the Director of Transport and Environment (Leicestershire County Council):

Page 4 of the agenda, second bullet point:

“If it was an ordinary water course, the County Council had permissive enforcement powers (the same as the EA for main rivers).”

Further clarification was provided as follows:

“The County Council. (like the EA) do not police watercourse maintenance and rely on reports from members of the public or during site visits to raise blockage concerns. They would then liaise with landowners to request they fulfil their riparian duty. The County Council may exercise permissive powers, but only as a last resort.”

As the County Council had confirmed they would not be able to send a representative to attend a scrutiny panel meeting due to its scrutiny protocol and resource implications, members consulted the Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment on the matter. He explained that the Environment Agency (who had confirmed they could attend) managed flood risk. The County Council had recently adopted the Leicestershire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy which the panel could review, and County Council representatives attended the Leicestershire Flood Risk Management Board of which the Head of Contracts was also a member. Recommendations from the Panel could be fed back to the Board.

8. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND OTHER REGISTRABLE AND NON-REGISTRABLE INTERESTS

No disclosures were made.

9. DECLARATIONS OF THE PARTY WHIP

No declarations were made.

10. QUESTIONS UNDER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PROCEDURE 11.16

No questions were submitted.

11. SCRUTINY SCOPING DOCUMENT

Considered and discussed the scrutiny scoping document for the Panel, as agreed by the Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 5th February 2024 and updated following the last meeting.

AGREED that the Scrutiny Scoping Document be noted.

12. REVIEW OF FLOODING SCRUTINY PANEL 2014

The Chair of the Panel presented a light touch review of the Charnwood Borough Council Scrutiny Panel findings from 2014. She noted that the main themes of the recommendations from the Panel had been communication and planning. She asked the Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment to provide commentary on the recommendations.

Officer / Member Discussion:

- a list of Flood Wardens was managed by the Local Resilience Forum and further recruitment was being arranged to supplement the current list. Councillors could be informed of who the wardens were and where they were located.
- it wasn't clear if flooding awareness events had occurred although briefings were held after a flooding incident. Post event briefings tended to be more well attended.
- when there was a flooding event officers would visit the affected areas promptly and provide information to residents. It was a good opportunity for the Council to gather information on who was affected and whether they were vulnerable. Noted that in some cases residents might have left their properties so information was also shared via the Council's social media channels. Resources were sought from all staff within the Council and members could be involved if they wished. The Borough Council tried to coordinate its visits with other partners (including LCC and EA) to ensure that residents were not overwhelmed with visitors at a stressful time. Noted that the EA would visit properties to determine the extent of the flooding to inform its flood maps.
- a 'recovery cell' would be created after the immediate flood threat had receded to agree actions. A communications cell was also created, noted that both cells were multi agency.
- it could be challenging to develop a single list of properties affected between all agencies after a flooding incident. The list was managed by the County Council, with a link on its website for reporting of flooding. If a resident had reported they had been affected by flooding to the Borough Council, it would

- input the information onto the LCC website. Noted that some residents did not report flooding until it became clear that grants were available.
- as part of the process, Social Services would map onto the list any residents who were known to be vulnerable. Flood wardens often had local knowledge to help to prioritise vulnerable residents who may not be registered with social services. This was key to the flood response.
 - it wasn't clear which flood alerts to sign up to, and some of the flooding sensors on water courses appeared to be erroneously located and it was believed that the gauges in water courses were not routinely monitored.
 - whether a single telephone number could be used to share information with residents, noted that there was a single online form. It was possible that the Flood Line could be used, currently it provided flood alerts only and if a resident was not in an area that was considered high risk they would not receive any alerts. Considered crucial to investigate as areas which had flooded in January 2024 were not known flood risk areas.
 - although the Council's communications were effective, utilising local radio/news and its website, noted that some residents would not be able to access the information easily.
 - whether it was possible to proactively contact residents when high rain was forecast. This was complicated as flooding was unpredictable and not always in the expected areas.
 - the Borough Council had a sandbag policy, which was consistent across the Resilience Partnership organisations and it would distribute sandbags or aqua sacks, at a cost of £6K each time, to safeguard critical infrastructure and high risk parish and town councils / locations. Residents were encouraged to obtain personal sandbags if in a high risk area. Noted some occasions where the sandbags had not been accessible to residents as stored in a locked location, it was at the discretion of parish and town councils to distribute them.
 - there were legal restrictions on who could put up temporary signage which currently excluded flood wardens as members of the public. effective signage on flooded roads was still a big concern. Although noted it was challenging to know prior to flooding which areas were going to flood, there was also the impact of bow waves from vehicles driving through flooded areas on properties that were not flooded. The legalities of who could install signage was being reviewed, noted it was the responsibility of LCC to install signs.
 - the Police were able to close roads but noted that signage in the Barrow/Sileby area around Slash Lane had been unhelpful and there had been 11 vehicle rescues. It could be beneficial to invite the Fire and Rescue Service to attend a panel meeting to consider the cost of such rescues and what could be done as a preventative measure. Considered whether it was possible to install a gate on Slash Lane - this would be the responsibility of the Highways Authority.
 - GIS flood mapping was no longer required as the EA mapped rivers and surface flooding information - these maps were regularly updated. Noted that the EA were statutory consultees for planning applications.
 - the requirement for SUDs schemes ensured that planning was granted only if the flood risk had been reduced, but it was unlikely that climate change was taken into account. It was complex to determine who was responsible for maintaining SUDs schemes, a land registry search could clarify. A Local Authority could adopt a scheme if it had been built to a certain standard, but not retrospectively. Some schemes were owned by developers who had

subsequently gone out of business. SUDs schemes were designed to help with water from roads and storm drain water, acting as storage facilities before discharging water slowly into water courses.

The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment was asked to provide updates to the Panel on the following:

- i. To confirm with the Resilience Partnership, the current status of Flood Wardens and recruitment, and consider placing adverts on the Council's website.
- ii. to obtain a list of existing Flood Wardens and locations to share with councillors whilst being mindful of GDPR.
- iii. To confirm with the Head of Planning and Growth if officers attended flooding awareness events and whether these were being held.
- iv. To provide a proforma for members who might wish to be involved with the flooding response after an incident.
- v. To investigate whether it was possible to have a single telephone number for sharing of information with residents.
- vi. To clarify whether the flood warden at Barrow Upon Soar was responsible for turning on the flood alert light.
- vii. To confirm which kinds of planning applications the EA were consulted on.
- viii. To determine the position of adopted SUDs schemes where the developer had gone out of business.

AGREED that

1. The Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment to provide updates to the Panel for the above points i – vii;
2. flooding forecasts be included in the Charnwood newsletter;
3. Information of who to contact when there was a flood incident to be included with Council tax information sent to residents;
4. Instructions on how to use aqua sacks to be included on the external packaging of the bags (to wet first for e.g.);
5. The panel to note its concerns about ineffective flooded roads signage and to consider exploring opportunities to improve signage at a later meeting.

13. PREVENTION AND RESPONSE / RECOVERY

A report of the Head of Contracts; Leisure, Waste and Environment was considered and discussed.

Member discussion:

- it could be beneficial to share the graphic showing methods to improve the flood resilience of a property with residents. Residents could receive up to £5K in grants to improve their properties but this required upfront expenditure by the residents to obtain a survey which could be redeemed against the grant if measures were required. However as the resident would not be able to reclaim the money if it was identified that improvements could not be made, this was considered a barrier for some residents.
- including flood resilience measures during the building of new home developments should not be required, as the planning application would be refused if measures were required.

- creating more wetlands and introducing trees strategically was challenging. Land owners could be reluctant to lose high value arable land.
- the Borough Council had emergency plans in place and did practice and test scenarios with officers. Part of its on the ground management included street cleaning, waste removal and supporting residents with housing issues.

AGREED that the Head of Contracts; Leisure, Waste and Environment provides an example scenario of the processes followed from the start of a flooding incident to the end, including triggers.

14. QUESTIONS TO ASK INVITED REPRESENTATIVES

Members considered and discussed questions it wished to ask of representatives of the Environment Agency.

The Panel determined that possible areas to seek clarification from the EA included:

- how effective the flood warning system was in Charnwood as some areas were not covered, - i.e. no flood gauges in Syston, Sileby, or Barkby Brook, the siren at Sileby Brook did not appear to be linked to the flood warning system.
- to explore how residents could get flood warning alerts in time to act. Noted the EA were responsible for implementing the infrastructure for this.
- as Loughborough had the highest risk in the East Midlands, what plans did the EA have in place to mitigate this.
- clarification of what maintenance plans were in place, whether any proactive maintenance was being done and what powers the EA had.
- what would the EA seek to implement if funding was not limited.
- monitoring of waste grills across water courses – determining which had gauges or cameras.
- if residential areas were flooded but was not identified as being a flood area by the EA or Severn Trent, how could this be updated.

AGREED that the above information be shared with the EA prior to the next meeting.

15. WORK PROGRAMME AND KEY TASK PLANNING

Considered and discussed the key tasks in the scrutiny scoping document and items raised during the meeting to be considered at the next meeting of the panel and any work members of the panel would undertake in advance of the next meeting.

Members discussed concerns regarding flooding of roads across the flood plain of the River Soar near Sileby and confirmed it was within the remit of LCC Highways.

AGREED that

1. website information and links shared during the meeting be circulated to the Panel by email;
2. Panel Members to review the Flood Risk Strategy before the next meeting;
3. a discussion item to be included on the next meeting agenda for Panel members to share research and reading completed between meetings;
4. representatives from the Environment Agency be invited to the next meeting;

5. the Head of Contracts: Leisure, Waste and Environment to prepare a report providing an example scenario of the processed followed from the start of a flooding incident to the end including triggers;
6. that the work programme be updated to reflect discussion during this and other items on the agenda.

NOTES:

1. No reference may be made to these minutes at the next ordinary Council meeting unless notice to that effect is given to the Democratic Services Manager by five members of the Council by noon on the fifth working day following publication of these minutes.
2. These minutes are subject to confirmation as a correct record at the next meeting of the Flooding Scrutiny Panel.