

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

LOCAL ACTION TO MANAGE FLOOD RISK IN NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To consider the conclusions and recommendations of the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel in relation to local action taken to manage flood risk in North Lincolnshire.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 At its meeting held on 20 January 2010, the council considered a report of the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel in relation to a review of local action taken to manage flood risk in North Lincolnshire.
- 2.2 The report was approved by council and referred to cabinet for consideration of the recommendations with a view to the preparation of an action plan.
- 2.3 The panel completed its review in December 2009. It was carried out with a brief -
- To consider the arrangements the council has put in place to mitigate the impact of any future flooding incidents.
 - To consider if those arrangements are robust enough and have the support and commitment of all other agencies and stakeholders.
 - To investigate the success and workings of the flood forum and consider its effectiveness, as seen from other partners.
 - To explore the effectiveness of emergency plans with individuals and community groups.
 - To consider the implications to overview and scrutiny of the recommendations arising from Sir Michael Pitt's review into the floods of 2007.
- 2.4 Following its review the panel made 33 detailed recommendations. A copy of the conclusions and recommendations are attached as an appendix to this report.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 There are no options associated with this report.

4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

4.1 There may be some resource implications associated with the recommendations when they are implemented.

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

5.1 There may be other implications associated with the implementation of the recommendations which will be highlighted in any action plan.

6. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

6.1 The panel consulted widely with other scrutiny members and officers and other organisations and individuals in relation to the preparation of the original report.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 That the report and recommendations be approved and adopted.

7.2 That appropriate Service Directors and other officers, together with the appropriate Cabinet Members prepare an action plan in response to the recommendations of the report for submission to a future meeting of cabinet.

SERVICE DIRECTOR LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report - Report of the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel

THE PANEL'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the evidence presented and evaluated during this investigation, as detailed in the panel's findings and considerations, the conclusions and recommendations of the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel are as follows: -

Critical infrastructure resilience

The extreme flooding in the summer showed just how poorly protected much of our critical public infrastructure, such as public buildings is. Critical infrastructure is defined as those systems and services so vital that their incapacity would harm the nation's physical security, economic security, or public health. The local resilience forum has a key role in helping protect the nation's critical infrastructure from all types of hazards through programs of mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. Examples of critical infrastructure include agriculture and food, banking and finance, chemicals, commercial facilities, critical manufacturing, drinking water/water treatment, emergency services, energy, government facilities, information technology, public health and healthcare, telecommunications and transportation

Members needed to look no further than Pittwood House, the council's corporate headquarters, which was flooded on Monday 25 June 2007. Such was the damage caused by the floods that the building was uninhabitable due to contamination of the vital utilities. Of more importance was the loss of the telecommunication network, which caused a great deal of frustration to the public.

This led the panel to question just how effective the Civil Contingencies Act is in getting Category 2 responders (such as the utilities) to plan for and respond to flood incidents.

The summer floods have highlighted that more needs to be done about this issue.

Recommendation 1 That the Humber Local Resilience Forum be asked to review how vulnerable critical infrastructure is to flood risk, and revise risk registers and plans. The pollution and health risks should be integrated into these plans.

Civil Contingencies Act

The floods certainly tested whether emergency responders were ready and able to react effectively. In general, the scrutiny panel believed the incident command system worked well. Members' experience during the summer floods of 2007 showed just how valuable joint exercises and strong working relationships with our professional partners are. Carrying out more exercises together more often could improve the current system further.

However, at the local resilience forum, consideration should be given to what extra preparation needs to be made to ensure that the risk of flooding is a high priority which all partners can respond to effectively.

Recommendation 2 That the Humber Local Resilience Forum multi-agency emergency response plans, as identified as very high risk in the Community Risk register be reviewed to make sure that they are consistent with the Civil Contingencies Act, and that all professional partners have access to adequate resources for managing flood events.

Declaring an emergency

Members were made aware that Pitt's recommendation number 43 was that 'Gold Commands should be established at an early stage on a precautionary basis where there is a risk of serious flooding'.

During the summer floods of 2007, it was at Hull that Humberside Police established its Gold Command. However, the scrutiny panel became aware that procedures for how and when 24/7 organisations (for example the Police) communicate with non routinely 24/7 organisations (for example Parish Councils) needs to be clarified.

It is crucial that all authorities present at Gold Command are clear on their responsibilities for cascading information to other organisations, and that information is shared in a timely manner.

Recommendation 3 That the Humber Local Resilience Forum takes the opportunity as part of future training events to ensure that there is a full understanding of the role of its partner organisations and their relationship with each other.

North Lincolnshire Flood Forum

Members of the scrutiny panel were impressed with the speed and commitment shown by partners to establish the Flood Forum.

This multi-agency group received national recognition for its work since the summer floods of 2007 and early 2008. However, some Flood Forum partners commented that as there had been no wide spread floods since early 2008, there was now a different role required of the Forum.

The Fire Service is represented on the Flood Forum and the Police have attended in the past. However, it could be argued that it is not an efficient use of the emergency services resources to attend Flood Forum meetings that may focus solely on engineering issues for example. Therefore, members are of the opinion that the Flood Forum would benefit from a split, with a meeting being held to discuss engineering issues, and a separate meeting of partners to discuss emergency planning issues.

Recommendation 4 That the Flood Forum consider amending their terms of reference to allow the emergency service representatives to attend a sub-group meeting specifically for emergency planning issues only.

Flood Forum partners were unanimous in their support for the Flood Forum. However, they did express their concern that the available capacity within their

respective organisations to attend meetings was reducing, especially bearing in mind that due to the boundaries of their organisations they would be attending similar meetings in North East Lincolnshire, West Lindsey, East Lindsey and Lincolnshire County.

They therefore requested that some economies of scale be created by merging some of the Flood Forum meetings.

Recommendation 5 That the Flood Forum give consideration to inviting North East Lincolnshire Flood Forum to merge their meeting to create a Northern Lincolnshire Flood Forum, thereby sharing expertise and providing economies of scale for Flood Forum partners. In addition, Flood Forum partners should explore extending the invitation to flood forum partners in Lincolnshire.

Governance Arrangements

The scrutiny panel heard how North Lincolnshire Council is covered by the Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber (GOYH) for governance purposes. GOYH works to influence and develop government programmes and initiatives at a regional and local level. It works in partnership with relevant organisations to meet local needs.

Government Offices were set up in 1994. They manage regional programmes on behalf of central government. They also inform the development of government policies from a regional perspective.

However, the GOYH is not co-terminus with the boundaries of the Environment Agency and Internal Drainage Boards which cover North Lincolnshire. For flood protection, North and North East Lincolnshire are not covered by GOYH at all. North of the Humber is included, but south of the Humber is not included, as there is an assumption that North and North East Lincolnshire will be included in the East Midlands (which includes Lincolnshire) region.

Therefore, from a capacity point of view, officers from North Lincolnshire Council are attending governance meetings at both GOYH and Government Office for East Midlands, even though North Lincolnshire is not included in GOYHs flooding arrangements.

Recommendation 6 That in the short term North Lincolnshire Council officers continue to attend meetings at the Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber and consider attending meetings at the Government Office for East Midlands.

Communication with the public

Across the Humber region, the floods generated extremely high levels of local, national and international media interest. Overall, media coverage during the event was generally factual and balanced. Many radio and television stations provided a good public service throughout the event. They broadcast frequent informative updates, sometimes including hourly interviews with incident staff.

These broadcasts undoubtedly helped inform the public about the seriousness of the event, and measures they could take to help themselves. However, there were examples of 'mixed messages being broadcast as a result of different partners conveying slightly different messages to the media.

Recommendation 7 That as the lead agency in a flood emergency, the council's Public Relations Department should be more visible early in incidents to reassure the public and make sure that Flood Forum partners provide authoritative and consistent messages to the media.

Members heard that Pitt Recommendation number 67 recommended that the Cabinet Office should provide advice to ensure that all Local Resilience Forums have effective and linked websites providing public information before, during and after an emergency.

Recommendation 8 The scrutiny panel suggests that a system is developed, whereby each Category 1 Responder organisation can post relevant public information on (or linked to) a designated space on the same web-site in order that it can be more easily checked by the public and other organisations.

Recommendation 9 That once this provision is in place, members of the public, particularly those in flood risk areas, be advised of the web site address so that they can access the site during an emergency.

NB Recommendations 8 and 9 are in addition to and not instead of the traditional communication mediums of local television and radio as members acknowledge that not all North Lincolnshire residents have access to the internet.

Communication with North Lincolnshire Council

Problems for affected North Lincolnshire residents were exacerbated as Pittwood House was flooded. Whilst the flooding of the councils corporate headquarters would normally have no effect on local residents, the fact that the council's entire telecommunications network was 'wiped out' meant that local residents had no way of contacting the council. It also meant that the council's website was also unavailable for a considerable period of time.

The council now has a designated customer contact centre based away from Pittwood House. In addition, all the council's IT servers have been moved to locations that should not be affected by future flooding emergencies. Similar problems should not therefore occur again.

Members learned that Pitt recommendation number 66 is for 'local authority contact centres to take the lead in dealing with public advice before, during and after a flood, redirecting calls to other organisations where appropriate'.

Recommendation 10 That the feasibility of introducing a system to enable the council's customer contact centre to re-direct callers be investigated. Should this recommendation be implemented, the Flood Forum should ensure that the customer

contact centre has the necessary information to ensure that the member of public is redirected appropriately.

Communication with Parish Councils

As part of the review, the scrutiny panel spoke to a cross section of town and parish councils. The town and parish councils were selected based on whether they did or didn't have a Community Emergency Plan and whether they were flooded.

Like members of the public, the scrutiny panel is aware that town and parish councils simply had to cope as best they could during the summer floods of 2007. Town and parish councils in North Lincolnshire generally did not have emergency plans or contact numbers and little or no involvement with the Local Resilience Forum. They did however believe that there were many ways in which they could assist (and were willing to do so).

Arising from the town and parish council workshop, members were greatly encouraged that town and parish councils were willing to take on a more proactive role in response to an emergency providing they have the necessary tools and support.

Recommendation 11 That for any emergency affecting North Lincolnshire, town and parish councils be provided with emergency contact details of Category 2 responders to enable them to report local conditions (such as road conditions) for example.

Following the summer floods of 2007, the council implemented a 'flood buddy' scheme. This is a scheme that enlists the help of either a town and parish councillor or a local resident to notify fellow parishioners of any flood risks. However, not all town and parish councils have elected to join, and after 15 months work, there are still 15 not engaged in this scheme.

Members heard from some town and parish councillors who thought the initiative was excellent. However, some town and parish councils were not overly impressed with the flood buddy proposal as they felt it was an impossible task, particularly in the larger town and/or villages.

Members, however, were of the opinion that any initiative that could improve communication between the Flood Forum and town and parish councils, as well as between the town and parish council and parishioners should be supported.

Recommendation 12 That the Flood Forum actively promote the flood buddy scheme and actively promote the benefits of the initiative to the 15 remaining town and parish councils which have not signed up to the scheme.

Community Emergency Plans

As was explained previously, the scrutiny panel spoke to a selection of town and parish councils who were affected by the summer floods of 2007. Members learned that there is no statutory responsibility for town and parish councils to plan for, respond to, or recover from emergencies. However it is good practice for communities to identify hazards and make simple plans on how they may respond.

The Humber Local Resilience Forum has drafted Community Emergency Plans. These are comprehensive documents which require the town or parish council to identify how it will respond to an emergency.

However, the documents do not place any formal requirement on town and parish councils to make emergency plans. Any participation by the town or parish council is purely voluntary

It should also be recognised that the town or parish council is not an emergency service. It is not trained, equipped, empowered or resourced to carry out the functions of an emergency service. The response should generally be confined to looking after the welfare of people in the community or helping to maintain the infrastructure

However, town or parish councillors identified that whilst they were willing to complete the Community Emergency Plan, they felt that they lacked the necessary skills and expertise to complete the document.

Members believe that it would be useful for North Lincolnshire Council to take the lead on completing the Community Emergency Plan, providing support to aid its completion, to those parishes most likely to be affected by flooding.

Recommendation 13 That the council's Emergency Planning Team formulates a plan of how they intend to assist town and parish councils with the completion of their Community Emergency Plans. In addition, the council will provide more than just a skeleton document to enable all parishes to create their own emergency plans for use in appropriate circumstances.

Internal Drainage Board

An internal drainage board (IDB) is a type of operating authority which is established in areas of special drainage need in England and Wales with permissive powers to undertake work to secure clean water drainage and water level management within drainage districts. The area of an IDB is not determined by county or metropolitan council boundaries, but by water catchment areas within a given region.

Much of their work involves the maintenance of rivers, drainage channels, ordinary watercourses, pumping stations and other critical infrastructure, facilitating drainage of new developments, the ecological conservation and enhancement of watercourses, monitoring and advising on planning applications and making sure that any development is carried out in line with legislation (PPS 25). IDBs are not responsible for watercourses designated as main rivers within their drainage

districts; the supervision of these watercourses is undertaken by the Environment Agency.

North Lincolnshire is served by ten IDBs. Members of the Flood Forum expressed their concern that appointments, attendance and participation by elected members at IDBs is ad hoc at best. Forum partners believed that appointments should be widened to include council officers as well as members of the public who have an interest in the work of IDBs.

Recommendation 14 That in addition to elected members, the council expand its Internal Drainage Board appointment network to include council officers and other appropriate representatives.

Recommendation 15 That all council appointments to Internal Drainage Boards receive training on the role and responsibility attached to the appointment on an annual basis.

Internal Drainage Board witnesses informed the scrutiny panel that there is an element of frustration when comments made on planning applications by the Board are not given 'due care and attention' by the planning authority.

Recommendation 16 That the council engage in a dialogue with all Internal Drainage Boards to make sure that processes are in place to ensure that the Boards comments on planning applications are considered appropriately.

Planning

Members were acutely aware that residents affected by flooding were critical of the council for allowing housing developments in the floodplain.

Representatives from the Environment Agency informed the members that by definition all 19,000 homes flooded in England from rivers in the summer floods of 2007 are in the floodplain.

Data collected by the Environment Agency on a limited sample of 580 of the 19,000 properties indicated that around 28 per cent of these were built in the last 25 years. This only reaffirms the comments made at the scrutiny panel's workshops.

The Government's planning policy on development in flood risk areas, PPS25, was updated in January 2007.

Pitt says that PPS25 should be applied "rigorously" and that the 'exception rule' should not be used to build in inappropriate areas. Developers should, "make a full contribution to the costs both of building and maintaining any necessary defences."

Recommendation 17 It is essential that the council policy on development in the floodplain, PPS25 in England is firmly applied. Where development does go ahead in areas of flood risk, the council must ensure that the developers are responsible for achieving adequate flood risk management.

Members were also concerned about the perceived weakness in assessing flood risk in the planning application process. The Environment Agency flood risk zones were based on river, not surface water flooding. Planning applications outside these zones did not trigger the need for an automatic flood risk assessment.

Although the Environment Agency does provide advice, the members believe that the council's Planning Committee need qualified technical assistance when considering planning applications in flood risk areas.

Recommendation 18 That the Service Director Highways and Planning undertakes a review to determine whether the council has sufficient technical capability and if necessary ensures that a suitably qualified individual is available to advise the Planning Committee about drainage issues and flood risk implications for each development. Once completed, the review to be shared with this scrutiny panel for information.

Recommendation 19 That all North Lincolnshire councillors receive training on an annual basis on the impact of flooding on planning applications and the role of the Environment Agency as a statutory consultee on planning applications.

Flood Relief

The Environment Agency is responsible for the maintenance of "main rivers and strategic streams." For non-main rivers and streams the responsibility for their maintenance and the removal of obstructions etc. lies with the riparian owners of the land adjacent to the watercourse. Where a stream passes through a culvert underneath a highway for which the council is the highway authority, then the council is the responsible authority for the watercourse.

The council has permissive powers, rather than a statutory obligation. Under the Land Drainage Act, the council has the power to serve notice on landowners to adequately maintain a watercourse, and can prosecute for non-compliance. The council cannot however ask a landowner to improve drainage.

Recommendation 20 That North Lincolnshire Council, along with town and parish councils, identify and inform those landowners who have responsibility for maintaining any waterway under their ownership that the council will consider proactively making use of its powers to serve enforcement orders on landowners who do not comply with requests to maintain their ditches and/or watercourses.

In addition, the Local Government Act, 2000 provided local authorities in England and Wales with a new power of 'well-being', which entitles them to do anything that might achieve the promotion or improvement of the environmental and social well-being of their area. Where a landowner cannot afford or is unwilling to repair ditches or water courses and this has a detrimental effect on peoples lives and properties, then the council has the power under this Act, as well as powers attached to the Land Drainage Act and Highways Act to carry out any necessary work, with the possibility that it can claim back the costs from land owners or their estate.

Recommendation 21 That the council develops a policy whereby if a riparian land owner cannot afford or is unwilling to repair water courses, then under the Local Government Act 2000, they should consider the merits of carrying out the necessary work and where possible recover in full the cost of works back from the land owners or their estate.

Environment Agency flood warning service

During the scrutiny panel's investigation, members learned that the Environment Agency operate a Floodline Warnings Direct service which warns people about flooding from major rivers. However, the service does not cover the risk of flooding from sewers, drains, groundwater or ditches. The flood warnings are issued when river or sea levels reach a threshold or trigger level, or when the weather forecast show that high levels are imminent. The Environment Agency try to be as specific as possible about which areas will be affected before issuing a warning. However, members learned that a balance has to be struck between being accurate and alerting people soon enough so they can react appropriately.

Flood warning take-up

The Environment Agency informed members that in England and Wales, only 41 per cent who could receive flood warnings by phone or text are signed up to receive them. This equates to 276,000 registered customers.

The difficulty was that in North Lincolnshire, no properties were flooded as a result of rivers overflowing. Therefore, the service is not as beneficial to North Lincolnshire residents as it perhaps could be.

However, the service is completely free. Although it cannot predict surface water flooding, if residents in North Lincolnshire signed up to the service they would at least be made aware when water levels were at a dangerously high level.

The Environment Agency pre-registers customers using a process known as the 'opt-out approach'. This is because the Environment Agency use publicly available electoral roll and telephone number information to match with properties at risk, and then register people. They then have to opt-out if they don't wish to receive this service.

Recommendation 22 That the Flood Forum actively promote and encourage those victims of flooding to sign up to the Environment Agency's Floodline Direct Warning Service.

Flood warning for surface water flooding

Members were disappointed to hear that the Environment Agency is not currently responsible for surface water flood risk. The Environment Agency's forecasting and warning systems are not designed to deal with the widespread surface water flooding that occurred.

Whether cost effective and reliable warning systems will be technically feasible or viable remains to be seen. Urban drainage systems are complex and dynamic, changing rapidly with development, and it would be a costly challenge to map and model these and provide detailed warnings.

However, the members would like to see the Environment Agency explore the feasibility of them extending their current warning system to cover these forms of flooding as far as science and technology can reasonably allow. This would depend on the necessary resources being available.

Recommendation 23 That the Flood Forum ask the Government to consider the Environment Agency's proposals to develop surface water risk mapping and flood warning tools for their professional partners with a view to later wide scale application.

Inland flooding overview

Members learned that two-thirds of the 55,000 homes and businesses affected by the summer floods of 2007 were flooded because drains, culverts, sewers and ditches were overwhelmed. This is called 'surface water flooding'.

Local authorities, water companies, other utilities and the Highways Agency and landowners are the main organisations responsible for maintaining these facilities. In London, virtually all of the 1,400 properties flooded were due to surface water flooding. In the South-East and Yorkshire and Humberside regions, around 70 per cent of the properties flooded were from surface water. Just over half the properties flooded in the East and West Midlands and South-West regions were from surface water flooding. Understandably, people who are flooded are not necessarily concerned about what caused it, but rather what impact it has on them. The workshops held with members of the public showed that the public are confused over who is responsible for surface water flooding, in particular. No one organisation has overall responsibility and there has not been enough attention on managing surface water flooding in a co-ordinated way.

Mapping surface water flood risk areas

The scrutiny panel heard from Flood Forum partners that they had been extremely proactive in working together to map important ditches and surface water flood risk areas and exploring how to develop countywide flood risk GIS maps to enable better modelling.

This provision was in line with Pitt's recommendation number four in 'that the Environment agency should work with partners to urgently take forward work to develop tools and techniques to model surface water flooding'.

Recommendation 24 That the Flood Forum partners co-ordinate the sharing of information on GIS maps, working in collaboration and sharing information with the Environment Agency.

Gullies, drains, ditches and culverts

At the moment, no single organisation is responsible for surface water drainage. Sewers can be the responsibility of the council, water companies, householders or private owners.

Ditches and dykes can belong to the Environment Agency, Internal Drainage Boards, the council or neighbouring landowners or householders. Floodwater can pass from private to public responsibility and back. This responsibility can also pass between the relevant organisations. Each location is unique.

When drains begin to overflow, it is often difficult, and sometimes impossible, to determine who is responsible for certain drainage assets.

To help understand flood risk and resolve local disputes about who is responsible for flood risk, Pitt's recommendation number 16 is that 'local authorities should collate and map the main flood risk management and drainage assets (over and underground), including a record of their ownership and condition'. which the scrutiny panel would whole heartedly support.

Members learned that the Flood Forum has already undertaken this task, even before Sir Michael Pitt made his recommendation.

Recommendation 25 That members of the Flood Forum be congratulated for the excellent proactive work they have undertaken with regard to surface water management.

Members learned that the council has invested heavily in new machinery to assist it in cleaning gullies. The council now has at its disposal four gully tanker cleaners. These machines allow the council to clean all its gullies on an annual basis. However, the panel was told that the council is still experiencing problems cleaning gullies where special traffic management is required. In addition, offset type gullies are also a problem to clean.

Members were informed that currently the councils Neighbourhood and Environmental service carries out the gully emptying function, but Highways and Planning field all the complaints from residents. As a result of comments made during the investigation, the scrutiny panel interviewed members of the Council Management Team Communities Board to explore this issue further.

Arising from those discussions, the panel was reassured to hear that the Chief Executive had investigated and resolved the operational difficulties.

Recommendation 26 That in the immediate future, the council maintains its annual gully cleaning schedule as a minimum, and as soon as practicable, the council undertakes a review to determine which gullies require cleaning on a more frequent basis.

Recommendation 27 That the Chief Executive ensures that council services work more closely together to ensure that economies of scale are achieved when flood prevention activities are a) being planned and, b) undertaken.

Despite the 'operational difficulties', members of the scrutiny panel heard that in the main members of the public and local parishes were more than happy with the work undertaken by the council in cleaning and clearing gullies. However, town and parish councillors and members of the public were critical in that they were not aware of the gully cleaning schedule. Without this information, local residents could not inform the council if the gully had become blocked or had been missed off the schedule.

Recommendation 28 That as soon as is practicable, the council serve notice to all town and parish councils of its gully cleaning programme, with the aim of the town or parish council helping to disseminate this information to all local residents.

Public Advice

Members learned that since the summer floods of 2007, Flood Forum partners have published many informative articles through the council's magazine Direct, local newspapers and various websites. In addition, the Environment Agency has excellent informative brochures about flooding, and the National Flood Forum also provides very detailed information.

Members of the Flood Forum were extremely honest when they admitted that there is more that they could do to inform residents in North Lincolnshire of what, how and when they could protect their properties.

Pitt's recommendation number 60 states that 'the Government should implement a public information campaign which draws on a single definitive set of flood prevention and mitigation advice for householders and businesses, and which can be used by media and the authorities locally and nationally'.

However, the panel believes that the Flood Forum should not wait for the government to implement this recommendation and should action it immediately.

Recommendation 29 That as soon as practicable, the Flood Forum should publish a single definitive set of flood prevention and mitigation advice for householders and businesses in North Lincolnshire which can be used by the media and the authorities locally.

Informing local residents of any immediate threat of flooding is a very difficult task. However, that is not to say that the Flood Forum should not at least try to communicate with residents when their properties may be in danger. There are now many innovative communication tools at a council's disposal which could be utilised to raise awareness of the dangers of torrential rainfall.

Recommendation 30 That the Flood Forum and/or North Lincolnshire Council investigate the use of websites, social networking sites and text alerts in relation to warning residents of the immediate danger of flooding.

NB Recommendation 30 is in addition to using the Local Links, libraries, council offices etc.

Members were made aware that the National Flood Forum had launched a directory of flood protection products and services, known as the 'Blue Pages'. The pages provide advice on flood resilience as well as advice and guidance in the event of flooding. It aims to give consistent advice to the public.

Arising from the member's workshops with victims of the summer floods of 2007, one area of confusion was the use of sandbags and the responsibility for providing them. Pitt's recommendation number 26 stated 'that the Government should develop a single set of guidance for local authorities and the public on the use and usefulness of sandbags and other alternatives, rather than leaving the matter wholly to local discretion'.

The scrutiny panel wholeheartedly supports Pitt's recommendation number 26 as the council was unfairly criticised by members of the public for the lack of and poor distribution of sandbags, before, during and after the summer floods of 2007. Residents affected by the summer floods of 2007 assumed that sand bags would protect their properties.

However, the Service Director Highways and Planning informed the scrutiny panel that the council did not stock nor distribute sand bags to residents as they were not waterproof, required some kind of membrane to be effective and were difficult to dispose of after the event.

Recommendation 31 That aligned with recommendation 30, householders and businesses in North Lincolnshire be informed of the unsuitability of sand bags and instead be advised of the alternatives.

Drainage

Pitt recommendation number 19 states that 'local authorities should assess and, if appropriate, enhance their technical capabilities to deliver a wide range of responsibilities in relation to local flood risk management'.

Members learned that officers in the council's Highways and Planning service are undertaking flooding duties in addition to their current roles. The scrutiny panel was incredibly impressed with the goodwill shown by officers from Highways and Planning in undertaking their flooding duties. However, this situation is not ideal. There are positions that do require a certain level of expertise, with drainage engineers being one of those. This lack of flooding provision is to the detriment of North Lincolnshire.

The scrutiny panel is mindful of the potential resource implications but believes that additional resources should be sought from central Government to fund a dedicated flooding team.

Recommendation 32 That the Flood Forum ensures that suitably qualified officers at the council are appointed and that they are able to take the lead responsibility for checking the condition of drainage assets (watercourse and ditches) and sharing information with the Forum.

Pitt's Recommendation Number 91

Recommendation 91 states that 'each Oversight and Scrutiny Committee should prepare an annual summary of actions taken locally to manage flood risk and implement this Review, and these reports should be public and reviewed by Government Offices and the Environment Agency.'

The panel received a presentation from the Service Director Highways and Planning detailing all the flood prevention schemes either in progress, completed or due to start. The list is attached to the report at Appendix 1.

Recommendation 33 That in line with Pitt's recommendation number 91, this scrutiny panel will, on an annual basis, invite the relevant Service Director and Cabinet Member to a public meeting of the panel to discuss 'the local action taken to manage flood risk in North Lincolnshire'.

APPENDIX 1

Pitt Recommendation 91 states:

“Each Oversight and Scrutiny Committee should prepare an annual summary of actions taken locally to manage flood risk and implement this Review, and these reports should be public and reviewed by Government Offices and the Environment Agency.”

Among the action taken: June 2007 to date:

- Establish the Flood Forum coordinating all agencies with responsibility for managing surface water in North Lincolnshire. Sub Groups investigate flooding incidents and operational issues, coordinating a response and actions.
- Joint actions with other Agencies
- Coordinating responses to Government Reports, the Pitt Review, LGA and LGiU papers on flooding and recovery
- Liaison with national and regional groups
- Bids for funding to DfT for emergency highway works for flood damaged highways, DEFRA/EA for flood defence works
- Action design and construction for flood defence works and highway repairs funded through external funding bids and £1.7m allocated by the Council in 3 year capital allocation.
- Presentations and consultations with 43 parish councils
- Planning development embargo at Goxhill pending completion of Anglian Water drainage study
- Held a flood fair attended by 274 members of the public, 17 Councillors and 2 MPs.
- Review flood warning system to react to EA issued warnings
- Establish a flood buddy system to update on progress and provide flood warnings
- Develop a Flood Compendium
- Progress mapping of flooding risk areas and drainage systems concentrating initially on areas severely affected in June 2007 flood event
- Started GIS mapping
- Progress investigations of 600 flood locations
- Progress drainage inventory
- Commence electronic data inventory of gully locations
- Undertake weekly review of new planning applications to identify risks associated with development and provide feedback to Development Control on the implications/risks
- Review gully cleaning priorities and identify critical locations for more frequent cleaning
- Review representation on Internal Drainage Boards
- Progress funding bid for Property level flood protection through DEFRA, consulting with 700 residents and assessing 112 bids

- Prepare Flood Recovery Plan
- Update Highways Emergency Procedures Plan – duty manger system to respond to emergencies

Key Drainage Projects undertaken since the 2007 flooding

- Haven Road, North Killingholme culvert and embankment stabilisation
- Cornwall Street, Clay Lane, Kirton Lindsey relief drainage scheme
- King Edward Street, Belton relief drainage scheme
- A161 Haxey Lane, Haxey drainage improvement
- Wrawby Road, Brigg cemetery drainage
- Main Street, Ealand drainage improvement
- Flood Defence bunds at Barrow Road, Barton; Bigby High Road, Brigg and Scawby Brook
- Ditch improvements at North and South Killingholme, Jeffrey Lane, Belton, Station Road, Kirton Lindsey
- New Drains at Kirton Lindsey, Scawby, Brigg, South Killingholme, Wroot, Gunness
- New culverts at Winteringham, Kirton Lindsey
- Drainage Studies at Barrow upon Humber, Haxey, Kirton Lindsey and Low Burnham