

**FLOOD AND WATER MANAGEMENT
 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
 22 FEBRUARY 2021**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR P A SKINNER (CHAIRMAN)

Councillors R P H Reid (Vice-Chairman), W J Aron, T R Ashton, Mrs A M Austin, A G Hagues, Mrs C J Lawton, C R Oxby, S R Parkin and C E Reid

District Councillors R Austin BEM (Boston Borough Council), Mrs F M Martin MBE (East Lindsey District Council), Mrs L Hagues (North Kesteven District Council), M D Seymour (South Holland District Council), H Crawford (South Kesteven District Council) and I G Fleetwood (West Lindsey District Council)

External Agencies –

Councillors , attended the meeting as observers

Officers in attendance:-

Paul Brookes (Flood Risk Manager), Jonathan Glerum, Matthew Harrison (Senior Commissioning Officer - Flood Risk), David Hickman (Head of Environment), Nicole Hilton (Assistant Director - Communities), Tracy Johnson (Senior Scrutiny Officer), Rachel Wilson (Democratic Services Officer) and Morgan Wray

54 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor P Vaughan (City of Lincoln Council)

55 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor I G Fleetwood reported that he had been appointed to the Scunthorpe and Gainsborough Water Management Board.

56 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 30 NOVEMBER 2020

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 November be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

57 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLORS AND LEAD OFFICERS

There were no announcements by the Chairman, Executive Councillors or Lead Officers.

58 DEVELOPMENT FUND - DRAINAGE INVESTIGATIONS AND FLOOD REPAIRS

Consideration was given to a report that informed the Committee of the Development Fund for Drainage Investigations and Flood Repairs and its progress. It was noted that the Governance Document and Programme of Works were approved by the Executive on 2 February 2021.

It was reported that funding of £2.2m had been made available to address drainage and flooding issues in Lincolnshire. A programme of works was being developed in collaboration between the Floods Team and Highways. Implementation of this additional investment had been identified as £1.1m per annum for both financial years 2020/21 and 2021/22 with overall spend to be completed by March 2022.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions to the officers present in relation to the information contained within the report and some of the points raised during discussion included the following:

- It was noted that it was planned for Cherry Willingham to receive some funding and an issue with water gathering in an area known as Little Cherry was also highlighted. It was clarified that water was collecting in the junction between Hawthorn road and the new estate, and was entering residents gardens. A similar issue at Stainfield where water was gathering outside of some cottages was also highlighted, and officers advised that they would follow up on these issues outside of the meeting.
- Members were pleased to see the funding coming forward, and commented that it would give comfort to many councillors across the county. Concerns were raised with regards to the £200k which would be made available for sandbags and new technology to tackle flooding. It was highlighted that further details on this would be covered by the report at agenda item 7 (December Surface Water Flooding and Improvements to Local Incidence Response)
- It was queried how members could feed in intelligence regarding issues in their own areas to officers and the work programme. Members were advised that this was a set budget which needed to be delivered by March 2022 and the programme of works had been approved, therefore there was little scope to add to this particular programme. The programme was also being delivered with existing resources through the Highways Term Contract through Highways colleagues. However, any drainage issues could be addressed through drainage groups or highways groups.
- It was noted that a lot of the 'near miss' flooding incidents were being collated by the Flood Risk Manager and so members should continue to report any issues.
- It was queried what work was included in the £150k contribution to the River Steeping catchment area and members were advised that this contribution was to facilitate the work set out as part of the Steeping Action Plan and included some of the suction dredging of the channel as well as supporting the programme of works being carried out by the IDB's and the Environment Agency.

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- It was also queried how it was determined that work would be undertaken for this scheme, and also how projects would move up the priority list. Members were advised that the schemes were identified by Highways colleagues as well as the Floods Team, areas where they were aware of existing drainage and flooding issues, not necessarily just flooding to properties, but where there were also flooding and drainage issues on the highways. The programme of work identified those schemes where attention was required, but where funding may not otherwise have been forthcoming as quickly. This funding allowed the potential for those problem areas to be brought forward sooner than they would normally.
- It was queried whether there would be any additional staff brought in to undertake the investigations. It was confirmed that this work would be delivered with existing staff under existing contracts. It was acknowledged that this programme of works was likely to be a challenge to deliver, but it was likely that it would be delivered effectively with the current resources.
- Members commented that they welcomed the penultimate scheme on the programme, which would deal with a longstanding flooding issue in Kirton. It was queried whether all the schemes had come from the Section 19 investigations. It was hopeful that future funding could become available to continue this work. It was noted that the schemes had not come through the Section 19 investigation. It was running alongside other programmes of work and investigations.

RESOLVED

That the progress with the Development Fund for Drainage Investigations and Flood Repairs be noted.

59 FLOOD AND COASTAL RESILIENCE INNOVATION PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report which provided the Committee with a progress update on the development and submission, on behalf of a Greater Lincolnshire Partnership, of an Expression of Interest in the Defra Flood and Coastal Resilience Innovation Programme.

It was reported that in the 2020 Budget, the Government had announced a £200 million fund for a flood and coastal resilience innovation programme to help deliver the Government's policy statement on flooding and coastal erosion and the Environment Agency National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England.

The programme would allocate £150 million to 25 local areas, which could be a county, city, town or village. It was noted that this could also be a river catchment, tidal estuary or part of the coast. It was reported that Lincolnshire County Council had led on the development of an expression of interest based on the Greater Lincolnshire geography. If the bid was successful, there would then be an opportunity to create a business case. It was noted that this was the first step in what could be a long process, but this programme could help to identify actions which could provide resilience in other areas.

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Members were provided with an opportunity to ask questions to the officers present in relation to the information contained within the report and some of the points raised during discussion included the following:

- Members welcomed this and there was hope that the Greater Lincolnshire Partnership would be successful and receive one of these allocations.
- It was queried why North Kesteven and East Lindsey District Councils were selected as other districts were also keen to be involved. Members were advised that the creation of the group was more organic, and in the event of a successful bid it was likely that the group would be opened up to any other districts that were interested, to assist in developing and delivering actions.
- Members commented on the *community and voluntary sector action to be better prepared and recover more quickly*, and it was noted that this related to how communities could manage their own resilience and actions which could encourage new behaviours in community resilience. It was noted that one of the aims of the Partnership's programme was to provide better and more advanced warning of groundwater flood risk. This would be through monitoring of ground water levels so people could be better prepared for the risks of elevated ground levels. The aim would also be to raise awareness of actions that people could take in order to protect themselves.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee notes the report and progress made on the development and submission of the Expression of Interest; and
2. In the event of a successful Expression of Interest, support the further development of the resilience innovation programme for Greater Lincolnshire.

60 DECEMBER SURFACE WATER FLOODING AND IMPROVEMENTS TO LOCAL
INCIDENCE RESPONSE

Consideration was given to a report which reviewed the timelines and course of events over the 23rd and 24th December 2020 when heavy rainfall led to a number of flooding incidents in the south of Lincolnshire. The report also identified lessons learned from the events and informed improvements that had been and could be made between partners.

Whilst the event had not been large enough to trigger a standard multi-agency response, it did trigger a local response and was handled with the resources available within those circumstances. This event highlighted a need to review how those events which went beyond the forecast were prepared for. For this event it was reported that the forecast has indicated a much lower likelihood of significant impact than what was actually experienced. Stronger arrangements to prepare in advance for these kinds of events had now been put in place and also to prepare the flood cell arrangements between partners within the structure of the Lincolnshire Resilience Forum.

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Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions to the officers present in relation to the information contained within the report and some of the points raised during discussion included the following:

- In relation to sandbags, it was commented that once they had been used they became a problem for the environment and needed to be disposed of properly. It was positive that other options were also being considered.
- It was commented that there had been issues with a lot of water sitting on the ground and then running off, which had caused flash flooding events. There had also been confusion around who would be providing sandbags during these flooding events. It was highlighted that the cost of sandbags and other options, such as gel bags, could start to add up for homeowners and it was queried whether the county council was able to provide a grant scheme for those properties that were likely to flood. Members were advised that the question of affordability was a difficult one, and the benefit of sandbags was that they were cheap, however, once they had been exposed to flood water they were generally contaminated and would need to be disposed of by the Environment Agency in specialised landfill sites. It was acknowledged that there were several issues which would need to be considered in the future, and the new arrangements should ensure that those properties likely to flood would be provided with sandbags. There would also be work to determine how residents could support themselves to be more resilient.
- It was noted that it was not clear whether the provision of sandbags would be a district or county council function. It was noted that the County Council would be putting forward a policy on the provision of sandbags to the public and how the resource could be accessed.
- It was noted that the response from officers was welcomed, however, members did challenge the way that the flooding incident was handled as the multi-agency response had not been triggered, and co-ordination during the event had been unclear. It was also noted that there were some issues with "Fix my Street" and the gully clearing which was not taking place in a timely manner, and this issue had been highlighted to the Chairman of the Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee.
- It was commented that this type of flooding event was happening more frequently and without warning, and there was a need to be better prepared for them.
- It was commented that the flood alleviation scheme for Horncastle had saved a lot of properties from flooding over recent years. It was commented that it had been working at 25% capacity and it was queried whether it would be better to hold back more water and let it out over a longer, slower period. The Environment Agency advised that the idea around the flood storage areas was to take the peak off the water as it went down stream, and the aim was to keep as much space in the flood storage areas as possible. Therefore, water courses would be kept as close to their maximum capacity as possible downstream.
- It was commented that in some situations home owners having water bags would not suffice, as in Bourne, during the December event, the fire and rescue service pumps were needed. There was a need to help and inform residents with what they can do to protect themselves.

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- Members thanked all the staff who had worked tirelessly over Christmas in response to the flooding events. There was also a need to learn from these events, and it was important that organisations worked together, and to adopt a precautionary principle as an approach.
- It was queried whether the county council was adequately resourced for dealing with these types of events. Members were advised that from an officer perspective, more resources were always needed. It did seem like more of these events were occurring, and how much additional resource would be needed was a difficult question. As part of developing the approach future resilience would be considering the logistics and deployment of resources to ensure that they can be moved to where they were needed.
- It was commented that since December 2020, the Environment Agency, IDB's and other partners had been on a constant state of alert, and thanks were given for the work they had been doing to support the communities in Lincolnshire.
- It was commented that it was useful to compare the last 3 – 4 years to a time 20-30 years ago, as these flooding events did seem to be occurring at an increased frequency, and stand out events seemed to be happening on an annual basis. It was also observed that the volume of sediment which was coming through the drainage system also appeared to have increased. It was noted that some of these issues were being examined through the work on the River Steeping with the Lindsey Marsh Drainage Board, Environment Agency and other partners and some of this learning could be applied more broadly.
- Thanks were given to the drainage boards and other partners who had supported members and communities throughout these flooding events.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

**61 INVESTIGATIONS UNDERTAKEN UNDER SECTION 19 OF THE FLOOD AND WATER
MANAGEMENT ACT 2010**

Consideration was given to a report which informed the Committee of the status of all current flood investigations being undertaken in the County. It was noted that in comparison with 2019, 2020 had been relatively quiet in terms of Section 19 Flood Investigations, although the numbers were still significantly above average. It was also highlighted that it had been a particularly busy couple of years, which had impacted on the amount of time it was taking to complete reports. It was noted that it was the complexity of some of the investigations as well as the volume of investigations which was causing a delay. However, the reports were now starting to come through.

It was reported that officers had taken the step of reviewing how the investigations were carried out, in order to give a more proportionate response, for example where the cause was clear or there were minor consequences. It was hoped that this would speed up the process around completing investigations.

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It was also reported that there was a new way of providing the information on the current flood investigations available through the website and it was hoped that members had had the opportunity to have a look at this.

(NOTE: Councillor R Austin left the meeting at 11.26am)

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions to the officers present in relation to the information contained within the report and some of the points raised during discussion included the following:

- It was commented that the opportunity to interrogate a live report was welcomed, and the amount of work which had gone into creating this was appreciated.
- It was highlighted that there were some reports for Horncastle on the list which had been active for nine years, and it was suggested whether these needed to be brought to a close quickly so they could be removed from the list. Members were advised that there was confidence that a number of the older investigations would be completed in the near future, and following the review of the way investigations were completed, there should be a greater number of investigations which would be completed in a more timely manner.
- The work which was ongoing in this area was supported, and it was acknowledged most investigations were individual in their complexity and that sometimes lengthy enforcement actions were necessary, where riparian rights were involved.
- Queries were raised in relation to flooding incidents in Kirton, which had taken place a number of times, and required attention. Officers advised that they would look into this further and provide an update to the councillor in due course.
- There were concerns that the number of Section 19 investigations seemed to be getting longer and if the heavy rainfall continued the list would continue to get longer. Officers commented that they were conscious that there was a backlog of cases, and they had no choice but to investigate once they became aware of a flood, and so the workload was highly weather dependent. Investigations were being undertaken and reports were now starting to come through almost every day and work was underway to reduce the outstanding list to something more manageable.

RESOLVED

That the investigations undertaken in the County under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 be noted.

62 ENVIRONMENT AGENCY UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report which updated the Committee on Environment Agency (EA) activities, primarily in relation to Covid-19 with particular reference to the on-going delivery of the capital programme and recovery.

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Members were guided through the report and were provided with the opportunity to ask questions to the officers present in relation to the information contained within the report and some of the points raised during discussion included the following:

- The Environment Agency was thanked for the completion of the major refurbishment work on the Black Sluice Lock and the gravity lock in a timely manner despite the constraints caused by Covid-19, as this ensured there was not a major flooding event in relation to the South Forty Foot drain.
- It was commented that in relation to the South Forty Foot Drain it was impressive to see the water coming through the lock when there was a flood alert, and demonstrated that the work which had been done was having an effect and should reassure people that they had some protection.
- Thanks were given to the Environment Agency and contractors for the consideration which had been given to the residents on Wyberton Low Road as the works on the Haven Banks Scheme were taking place very close by.
- It was acknowledged that the banks at Barlings Eau had been reconstituted since the major flooding event the previous year, but there were still concerns regarding the recent high water levels and the resilience of the banks. Members were advised that the Environment Agency recognised that there were still some low spots in the banks, and sandbagging of those areas would be carried out if necessary. In terms of the resilience of the banks, there were a number of projects planned to understand what was required to improve the resilience of the approximately 1000 miles of flood banks which were in Lincolnshire.
- In relation to the delays in dredging, it was queried whether it was known when this may be able to continue and whether there were any plans to manage any effects of the delays of dredging. Members were advised that this had not yet been resolved. The Environment Agency was still waiting to hear whether the contractors were able to return to the UK to complete the work. It was noted that they were due to come back later in the year to complete another section of the Wainfleet relief channel. It was also highlighted that the dredging was part of scheme of measures.
- It was commented that the work which had been done on the flow rates on the South Forty Foot Drain had made a difference.
- It was queried whether there was a programme for de-silting, particularly for the River Waring, as increased amounts of silt seemed to be being deposited in the channel in the town. In terms of the de-silting in the River Steeping, it was noted that this was evidence based, but was not the only measure being used. It was reported that there were plans for other water courses, but there were no additional plans to carry out any further de-silting work on the River Waring at this time, but this could form part of a future action plan if necessary.

Members received a brief presentation from the Environment Agency which gave an overview of the flooding which took place over Christmas 2020.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

63 ANGLIAN WATER UPDATE

The Committee received a presentation from Anglian Water which provided an update on recent activities.

Some of the areas covered in the presentation included the following:

- Long term ambitions as contained within the Strategic Direction Statement;
- Impact of changing climate on operations;
- Recent flooding events in December 2020 and challenges that had been faced;
- High water levels and pumping operations
- Investment in resilience
- Roles and responsibilities and a continued need to work together
- On-going work with partners

RESOLVED

That the presentation be received.

64 FLOOD AND WATER MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report which enabled the Committee to consider and comment on the content of its work programme to ensure that scrutiny activity was focused where it could be of greatest benefit.

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to be held on 21 June 2021, and would be the first meeting of the Committee after the County Council elections in May.

The update on the development fund would be added to the work programme for the meeting in September 2021. The Senior Scrutiny Officer would also work with officers to schedule the remaining items.

The meeting closed at 12.38 pm