

**FLOOD AND WATER MANAGEMENT
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
27 NOVEMBER 2023**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR T R ASHTON (CHAIRMAN)

Councillors P Ashleigh-Morris, A J Baxter, M Brookes, S Bunney, K J Clarke, A G Hagues, R P H Reid, P A Skinner and I D Carrington

District Councillors D Middleton (Boston Borough Council), D Hobson (East Lindsey District Council), P Vaughan (City of Lincoln Council), M R Clarke (North Kesteven District Council), A C Beal (South Holland District Council) and I G Fleetwood (West Lindsey District Council)

External Agencies – Morgan Wray (Environment Agency)

Councillors , attended the meeting as observers

Officers in attendance:-

Simon Evans (Health Scrutiny Officer), Matthew Harrison (Senior Commissioning Officer - Flood Risk), David Hickman (Head of Environment), Chris Miller (Head of Environment) and Christopher O'Rourke (Communications) (Strategic Communications Lead)

10 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Peter Beford and Helen Crawford. It was reported that under Regulation 13 of the Local Government Committee and Political Groups Regulation 1990, Councillor Tyrell replaced Councillor Gary Taylor, and Councillor Ian Carrington replaced Councillor Susan Nutman as Vice-Chairman for this meeting only.

11 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No interests were declared at this point in proceedings.

12 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 18 SEPTEMBER 2023

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 18 September 2023 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

13 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLORS AND LEAD

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OFFICERS

The Chairman announced that nine Committee Members attended site visits on 15 October to locations such as the Horncastle and Louth flood alleviation schemes, the Louth Flood Storage Area, the Saltfleet, Fulbeck, Trusthorpe and Boygift Pumping Stations and coastal defences across the east of Lincolnshire. He thanked all involved in the organisation of the trip on behalf of the Committee.

The Chairman had extended the invitation to the Committee meeting to all Members of the County Council to provide them with a forum to raise local issues caused by Storm Babet, and welcomed all who were in attendance.

Councillor C Davie, Executive Councillor for Economic Development, Environment and Planning, had submitted his announcements to the Chairman to be shared on his behalf in his absence. The following matters were noted:

- The impact of Storm Babet in Lincolnshire was significant, and some catchments experienced over three times the average monthly rainfall.
- 29 Flood Warnings and 32 Flood Alerts had been put in place across the County, and Waddington rainfall gauging station had recorded the highest reading in 76 years during the storm.
- The Witham to Chapel Hill area had witnessed 364% of the average rainfall for October.
- 663 properties were recorded as internally flooded as a result of Storm Babet.
- The Flood and Water Team were analysing data and would investigate every instance of property flooding to determine its causes. This information formed part of the Section 19 (S19) Investigations that the Council undertook as part of its role as Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA).
- 482 properties were recorded with external flooding.
- 98 instances of highway flooding were recorded which led to 48 road closures.
- Currently, there were 147 S19 investigations being commissioned.
- Recently completed flood alleviation works in Cherry Willingham, Kirton, Long Bennington and Scothern had functioned well during Storm Babet and no reported instances of flooded property had been received at the locations where works were undertaken.
- The Government had announced multiple support grants for those directly affected by the effects of the storm, including a Community Recovery Grant, Council Tax Discounts and Business Rates Relief, all of which were administered by District Councils. Additionally, eligible flood-hit property owners where properties were seriously damaged internally between 19 and 25 October, could apply for up to £5,000 to make homes and businesses more resilient to future flooding via the Property Flood Resilience Repair Grant Scheme. This would be administered by the County Council, and Members were directed to the Flood Risk Management pages on the website for further information.

It was agreed that the announcements from the Executive Councillor for Economic Development, Environment, and Planning be circulated to Members and attendees.

14 STORM BABEL AND FLOOD & WATER TEAM UPDATE (INCLUDING SECTION 19 INVESTIGATIONS)

Consideration was given to a report from Matthew Harrison, Flood and Water Manager and Morgan Wray, Area Flood Risk Manager – Environment Agency (EA), on the impact of Storm Babet in Lincolnshire.

The Flood and Water Manager informed that 663 properties were recorded as internally flooded as of Friday 24 November, which was three times as many than records from other significant storms. At the time of the meeting, Members were informed that 147 Section 19 investigations (S19s) had been commissioned and were reminded that these figures were likely to change. Additionally, the government had launched the Property Flood Resilience Repair Grant which enabled eligible flood-hit property owners to apply for up to £5,000 to make properties resilient to future flooding. The Grant would be administered by the Council and residents were encouraged to register their interests. It was noted the Grant would be available until March 2025.

As part of this item, the Area Flood Risk Manager – EA guided Members through a presentation on the impact of the storm. The Draft Flood Hydrology Report determined that up to six millimetres of rain had fallen in a 15-minute period in some locations, and the EA responded by imposing 32 flood alerts and 29 flood warnings. EA colleagues also had attended several tactical and strategic command group multi-agency meetings. Finally, the Area Flood Risk Manager provided a brief overview of the anticipated recovery process, such as asset and defence inspections and a review of Flood Warnings.

The Committee and guest Members were invited to highlight any issues in their divisions caused by Storm Babet; an extensive discussion ensued, and the following matters were highlighted:

Section 19 Investigations (S19s)

- The Flood and Water Management Act 2010 granted supplemental powers to the Council and as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA), it was mandated to conduct S19s; this legal obligation required an identification of the source of flooding, and the process assessed whether all partners had sufficiently performed their function.
- Residents were consulted as part of the investigation, and it was highlighted that the Flood and Water Team valued local knowledge and experience; residents also received a copy of the final S19 report.
- The County Council's revenue budget commissioned S19s.
- The flooding of the B1190 had not triggered a S19; the Flood and Water Manager agreed to assess this matter but highlighted that property flooding was the current focus of the Flood and Water Team.

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- 'Near miss' data informed S19s, and it was acknowledged that external flooding was also distressing for residents. There was no statutory duty for the Council to inspect 'near misses' yet they were still investigated by the Flood and Water Team.

Emergency Response

- All attendees commended the efforts of the emergency services and their response to flooding.
- The Executive Councillor for Fire & Rescue and Cultural Services extended an invitation to the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee at the discretion of the Chairman and the Chief Fire Officer.
- Members were directed to the Lincolnshire Resilience Forum (LRF) website and were urged to attend the Member Training at the Lincolnshire County Emergency Centre.

Overflow of River Banks

- There were widely reported instances of water banks overflowing and bursting, and it was suggested by Members that raising the bank level could mitigate this in the future.
- The Flood Partnership Manager – Anglian Water (AW) informed that a river breach implied that AW assets were damaged.
- The Flood Partnership Manager – AW expressed that when watercourses broke banks, the sewer network became easily overwhelmed which led to the water being contaminated by effluent; it was further noted that sewer networks were complex and the primary issue they faced was infiltration.

Water Ownership and Responsibility

- Residents had informed many Members that they were unsure of which organisation to contact when faced with flooding, and that details were not easy to access or understand. Often, residents were redirected to other organisations which caused further distress.
- It was requested that Parish Council's be provided with a list of contacts in various organisations and their responsibilities.
- The Executive Councillor for Fire & Rescue and Cultural Planning informed that information regarding water ownership was available on the LRF website.

Flood Resilience and Climate Change

- The EA was determining whether flood warnings were timely and accurate; this information underpinned the importance of a community action plan. Members were also informed that flood alerts were issued in more areas than flood warnings and therefore may not have acknowledged or identified local nuances.
- Flood resilience was imperative as Officers anticipated that climate change would cause more extreme weather events.
- Members recalled that flood resilience was raised as a topic at multiple Drainage Board (IDB) meetings and apprehension was expressed as long-term prevention methods and efforts were considered somewhat inadequate.

Partnership working

- There was a public sector agreement in place that allowed Lindsey Marsh Drainage Board to carry out one-off emergency works on behalf of the EA on their watercourses if they were unable to deploy or attend immediately.
- The Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and its partners attempted to facilitate a coordinated and collected response to flooding.
- Partnership working was observed during and Storm Babet and colleagues had to follow the advice of other organisations such as Natural England, and were required to adhere to the relevant legislation.

Funding

- AW requested in excess of £25 million from the government to assist with the impact of Storm Babet in Lincolnshire.
- The National Flood Forum worked with residents regularly impacted by flooding to support their efforts in attaining accessible and affordable insurance on their properties.
- The Area Flood Risk Manager highlighted there was a small measure of additional funding for economically deprived communities to assist the most vulnerable residents impacted by flooding. Additionally, there was a small amount of provision to support those whose mental health was negatively impacted.
- Members welcomed the Property Flood Resilience Repair Grant Scheme.
- It was requested that the Executive allocated more money in the budget for flood prevention.

Resource management

- Members informed that some residents experienced difficulties in acquiring sandbags.
- The Flood Partnership Manager – AW informed that the flooding experienced in Lincolnshire was localised and severe, and in some cases all AW phone lines were busy and 2000 people were on hold.
- Members raised that some residents expressed disappointment towards limited responses from organisations; consequently, the Flood and Water Manager requested that details of these instances were forwarded to him for investigation.
- The Flood Partnership Manager – AW acknowledged residents' frustration however he noted that the volume of water could not be decreased by officers on the scene.
- It was considered whether resources ought to have been increased once flood warnings had been issued in Lincolnshire.
- The Area Flood Risk Manager informed the Committee that the EA typically used the reasonable worst-case scenario to proactively allocate resources.
- Members raised that it was necessary that residents ensured that sandbags were disposed of properly.
- AW was likely to conduct a full investigation into the issues identified with the Horncastle Flood Alleviation Scheme during Storm Babet; it was known that sluice did not operate automatically, nor did it collect as much water as expected.

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Maintenance

- The Executive Officer – Lindsey Marsh Draining Board (LMDB) informed that IDBs managed works in coastal and east bank areas and maintained these networks annually; LMDB were lobbying government for increased resourcing to facilitate river maintenance.
- The EA was restricted regarding their ability to deploy resources for maintenance; funding mechanisms prioritised certain properties - primarily residential - which was beneficial in an urban catchment. However, this rendered it difficult to source funding for rural catchments and agricultural properties.
- Residents reported they had not seen EA maintenance work in some locations for multiple years. Members highlighted that residents acknowledged the pressures faced by organisations caused by financial restraints, however the perceived lack of maintenance had exacerbated frustrations and the impact of flooding.
- The Flood and Water Team worked closely with Highways colleagues and trusted their oversight on road flooding.
- The Flood and Water Manager agreed to liaise with the Highways Team further to address blocked gullies.
- The EA, IDBs oversaw locally maintained watercourses, and the importance of collective responsibility was emphasised.
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Additionally, the following matters were also raised:

- The Flood and Water Team had recorded approximately 1500 instances of flooding of varying degrees, which led to the establishment of tactical command group to coordinate responses; Flood Risk Management authorities were also represented on this group.
- Floodline was ran by the Council and was open 24 hours a day.
- Residents were urged to report flooding on Fix My Street to alert the Flood and Water Team.
- It was noted that a Working Group on the response to Storm Babet would be established; it was emphasised the work of the Group ought to be broad, and include the human impact of flooding, as well as assessing other factors (contextual, economic, agricultural) and involve a cost benefit analysis of flood defenses and maintenance programmes.
- The minutes from the discussion on Storm Babet held at the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee would be circulated to Committee Members to inform the Working Group.
- Members acknowledged the severity of internal flooding and the adverse impact it had on residents' mental health.
- A number of particularly vulnerable people were affected by flooding.
- Groundwater flooding posed a problem for underground infrastructure.

RESOLVED

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1. That all information presented by contributors on Storm Babet be noted; and
2. That a Working Group be established to investigate the response of the Council and its partners following Storm Babet

15 ENVIRONMENT AGENCY UPDATE

It was noted that Members felt the Environment Agency had sufficiently updated the Committee on their recent activities in Lincolnshire within Item 5.

RESOLVED

That the information provided by the Environment Agency as part of Item 5 on their projects and key schemes be noted.

16 ANGLIAN WATER UPDATE

The Committee received a presentation from Lisa Bush – Head of Pollution Improvement Strategy – Anglian Water (AW) on Storm Overflows. This update was requested at the meeting of the Flood and Water Management Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 18 September 2023.

Members were informed that storm overflows were necessary and released diluted wastewater into rivers to prevent the sewers from overloading and backing up into properties. A 54% reduction in the duration of storm overflow spills had been observed, and AW anticipated £200 million of direct investment to facilitate further reductions.

AW recognised high public concern regarding storm overflows, and therefore had committed to 11 storm overflow improvement schemes; five of which were located in Lincolnshire.

There were 139 Storm Overflows in Lincolnshire, 54 of which spilled less than ten times per year. Between 2025-30, AW would invest over £28 million on improvements to storm overflows in Lincolnshire County Council.

During consideration of this item, the following matters were noted:

- Members requested further information on glass coated storm tanks; it was clarified that they held sediment and were easily cleaned; they were designed to empty once weather stabilised. It was further noted that the contents did not remain in the tank long enough to ferment.
- Members questioned how overflows were monitored and recorded. They were informed that AW recorded all overflows, and unexpected overflows counted as pollution. In these cases, AW were obliged to notify the EA.

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- It was questioned whether less pollution had occurred since monitoring overflows; it was clarified that a 54% reduction had been observed since monitoring, although it was accepted that this reduction was partially due to increased accuracy of records.
- Members welcomed that overflows were monitored, however they noted more investment may be required to mitigate the impact of climate change.
- Concern was raised that housing developments could exacerbate the complexity of draining issues and water ownership; the Flood Partnership Manager – AW informed the Committee that Zonal Charging was introduced by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which required developers to pay funds to AW to fund improvements to drains.
- Members emphasised the importance of partnership working between planning authorities, EA, AW and the Council.

RESOLVED

That the presentation from Anglian Water be noted.

17 PROJECT GROUNDWATER (GREATER LINCOLNSHIRE)

The Committee considered a report and presentation from Brett Rycroft Jones, Flood Resilience Programme Coordinator, and Vicky Jones, Flood Resilience Programme Coordinator which provided an update on the workings of Project Groundwater in Greater Lincolnshire.

Members were guided through the presentation, and were informed that multiple projects were underway in Salting Allotments (Grimsby), Hillside Avenue (Lincoln), as well as a Salinisation project in partnership with the University of Lincoln.

A significant project in Bourne to locate Boreholes was also ongoing, and Wilkin Chapman Solicitors were beginning proceedings to create a legal document defining ownership and maintenance responsibilities of Boreholes.

During consideration of the report, the following matters were noted:

- Many details regarding the origin and purpose of Boreholes were unknown; information held by the British Geological Society was limited, although it was established, they were predominantly used for water.
- The lack of information on the ownership and conditions of Boreholes emphasised the importance of developing the legal document.
- Members questioned the trend on salination problems, and were informed that the trend was becoming more noticeable to farmers; it was reported that retailers were requesting the same quantity of goods but farmers had to use more land to keep up with demand.

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- The Committee welcomed the work undertaken alongside the University of Lincoln on crop diversification, and the Flood Risk Coordinator informed Members that farmers in Holbeach and Clements were willing to trial the project.
- Members highlighted that crop yields were also affected by soil quality and ought to be monitored.

RESOLVED

That the report and presentation be noted.

18 COUNTY COUNCIL RESOLUTION ON SEWAGE DISCHARGES

RESOLVED

That this item be deferred until the meeting on 19 February 2024.

19 FLOOD AND WATER MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report by Simon Evans, Health Scrutiny Officer, which enabled the Committee to comment on the content of its work programme for the coming year.

It was noted that the County Council Resolution on Sewage Discharges would be added to the agenda of the meeting on 19 February 2024.

RESOLVED

That the Work Programme be approved subject to the above amendment.

The meeting closed at 2.18 pm