

Agenda Item No: 11
Report To: Cabinet
Date of Meeting: 15th June 2017
Report Title: Ground Water Management and Flood Protection Task Group
Report Author & Job Title: Ashley Taylor, Principal Policy Planner
Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Mrs Clair Bell



Summary:

The Groundwater and Flood Protection Task Group was set up as a task and finish group to consider how the Council works to prevent flooding in the Borough. The group met four times during 2016 and 2017, and has made several recommendations in relation to flooding. This report responds to those recommendations.

Key Decision: NO
Significantly Affected Wards: None – this was a topic rather than area based review

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is recommended to:-**

- I. Agree that the existing Water Group, comprising officers and partner organisations, is the focus for considering groundwater and flood protection issues in future and that Cllr Mrs Hicks is invited to become a member of that group;**
- II. Note the helpful work carried out by Task Group and thanks the members involved.**

Policy Overview: Public safety and protection of the environment are both high priorities of the Council.

Financial Implications: Potential budget and staff resource implications of any additional work streams

Legal Implications None

Equalities Impact Assessment Not Required

Background Papers: Annex 1 – Report by Cllr Mrs Hicks
Annex 2 – Terms of reference of Task Group

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Ground Water Management and Flood Protection Task Group

Introduction and Background

1. The Ground Water Management and Flood Protection Task Group was set up as a task and finish group to consider how the Council works to prevent flooding in the Borough. The terms of reference for the group are provided at Annex 1.
2. The group met four times during 2016 and 2017 and considered the following issues; emergency planning; roles and responsibilities of agencies in relation to flood risk; ditch and waterway maintenance of Ashford Borough Council assets; sustainable drainage, biodiversity and the role of Ashford Water Group.
3. Cllr Mrs Hicks (Chairman) has written a report which provides the conclusions and recommendations of the group. (Annex 1).
4. This report responds to those recommendations and sets out a way forward.

Proposal/Current Position

5. In general the Task group considers the Council to be well prepared and managing ground water and flood issues competently. The Task Group has made the following recommendations:
 - a. The 'Report It' App be improved so that residents can report water incidents to the appropriate authority;
 - b. Ashford Borough Council should ensure that it supports other agencies in their efforts to educate the public on their responsibilities especially in ditch clearing and invasive species;
 - c. Links should be provided and highlighted on the Ashford Borough Council website to agencies dealing with flooding issues;
 - d. There should a robust method of monitoring the Aspire work in maintaining waterways etc for which the Council is responsible;
 - e. The Ashford Water Group should continue in its current form with a nominated member representative who can relay issues as appropriate to the Cabinet and wider membership
6. In response to these recommendations:
 - (a) Emergency planning has been considering the use of the 'Report It' app for use in reporting incidents of flooding in the Borough. It is currently reviewing the use of the app for other purposes within its service before

making a decision. Discussions will also be required with IT to understand its capabilities for this purpose.

- (b) It is agreed that the Council can do more to support the work of other agencies that have responsibilities in educating the public regarding their responsibilities in relation to ditch clearing and invasive species. The focus for this will be by the Council sharing other agencies' campaigns through its website and social media.
- (c) Following a review of the Council's website, it is considered that the emergency planning pages relating to flooding already provide this information in a comprehensive manner. Emergency planning ensure that the information is kept fully up to date.
- (d) In relation to the maintenance of assets along waterways within its ownership (within the Land management Plan, 2014), the Council commissioned EPS engineering last year to undertake detailed surveys of 25 key waterways/grills across the Ashford area, and some outlying sites. Those surveys resulted in the production of a series of site specific reports, a risk assessment of each site and a schedule of works required to address issues identified.

Following the completion of the study a budget of £90,000 has been made available up to 2020 to carry out remedial works to the structures and de-silting /vegetation clearance works where required. Canterbury City Council engineering department has been commissioned to carry out the works, with the three highest priorities being completed this year. They will move straight onto the next half dozen priority works and continue until all remaining defective structures have been repaired.

A proposal for future planned inspection regimes was another outcome of the EPS commission, and has been incorporated into ASPIRE's ongoing work programme. As a result, each of those 25 site culvert gratings/head walls are now being regularly inspected.

The Council has also entered into discussions with the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership (KSCP), with a view to them undertaking remedial works to the waterways/banks/vegetation where it is appropriate to do so. An ongoing maintenance regime for the vegetation will then be put in place.

It should also be noted that the Council makes an annual statutory level contribution to the Internal Drainage Board (IDB). In 2017/18 this is £238,053 for work that will take place on land owned by the Council and other third party land owners. It is also the aim to see a Partnership Agreement with the IDB put in place this year so that it is effective for the Council to commission the IDB to carry out works on waterways in the future.

It is considered that with the good work ASPIRE are undertaking and the extra work being commissioned on improving the structures (with support from the IDB, KSCP and Canterbury CC) significant improvements have

been made to help mitigate against any future flooding in key areas of the Borough.

- (e) Ashford Water Group (AWG) was set up several years ago to ensure that the future development and expansion of Ashford also leads to the protection and enhancement of the water environment. It has a focus on flood risk and sustainable drainage, water efficiency and demand management, and water quality. The AWG currently runs as an officer group, bringing together partners involved with water issues in the Borough and there is significant cross over with the issues considered by this Task Group. It is therefore recommended that the Ashford Water Group should include a Member representative who can relay issues as appropriate to the Cabinet and wider membership.

Consultation Undertaken

Consultation has been carried out with the relevant services areas impacted by the recommendations, including emergency planning, cultural services, planning policy and environmental services

Conclusion

The Task Group, comprising Cllr. Hicks (Chairman) Cllrs. Burgess, Miss Martin, and Smith, has demonstrated how – with a very clear focus on a series of key issues - a task and finish group can explore important issues; test the robustness of the Council's position and make clear recommendations.

Portfolio Holder's Views – Cllr Mrs Clair Bell

'The carefully targeted review that this Task Group has carried out demonstrates the value of members focusing on specific key issues and then bringing back their findings to the Cabinet and the wider membership. Flooding and surface water issues are hugely important for many parts of the Borough and testing our preparedness both for emergency events and the regular, routine maintenance needed to prevent problems is a very worthy exercise. The Task Group should be thanked for a job well done'.

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Report to Cabinet

Groundwater Management and Flood Protection Task Group

Members - Aline Hicks (CH), Mick Burgess, David Smith, Jane Martin

Meetings held on 15th Sept 2016, 13th Dec 2016, 14th Feb 2107 and 21st March 2107

1. Terms of reference are attached.
2. The general aim of this task group was to work to prevent flooding within the borough and to this aim relevant agencies were asked to advise the group on their activities. We also invited parish/community councils for their comments and were pleased to welcome members from SWANCG and SACF and Shadoxhurst parish to some meetings. The meetings were open to any borough councillor who had an interest.
3. It should be noted that Hicks, Burgess Smith and Sims are all members of the River Stour IDB and Burgess also a member of the Romney Marsh IDB. Also some members had attended the AGM in London and local area meeting at Ashford Market of ADA (which represents Drainage Water level and Flood Risk Management Authorities), as well as the workshops run by Southern Water in Canterbury.
4. Topics covered were _
 - (a) Emergency planning response and Flooding in the Borough;
 - (b) Kent Resilience Team;
 - (c) Responsibilities in relation to managing flood risk in the area;
 - (d) KCC -Land Drainage Act;
 - (e) Southern Water,
 - (f) Internal Water Boards,
 - (g) Environment Agency,
 - (h) Tidal Surge,
 - (i) Ditch and Water Maintenance of ABC assets,
 - (j) Ashford Water Group,
 - (k) Sustainable Drainage Systems,
 - (l) Biodiversity.
5. Highlights of these presentations were :-
 - (a) That ABC's resilience team has a document /list of all properties within the borough that could flood, and they can identify residents at risk and advise them of safely actions to take. The ABC team are engaged with the Kent Resilience team who also liaise with other agencies such as Social Services , NHS and Red Cross.
 - (b) ABC has commissioned a report on the location and state of their ditches and watercourses in the borough. Future maintenance is likely to be carried out by Aspire.

- (c) Responsibilities in relation to managing flooding risk in the area highlighted ownership of waterways and the SuDS system. It was noted that the SuDS System took account of climate change.
- (d) KCC explained that they have limited enforcement powers under the Land Drainage Act, but they could enforce riparian landowners to improve their water courses. .
- (e) Southern Water work closely with District authorities on local plan population figures.
- (f) The Environment Agency has to manage flood risk modelling .. It is an arms length body within DEFRA and has responsibility for updating flood risks area maps, which are kept under continual review
- (g) The East Coast Tidal Surge has resulted in Ashford being identified as a safe haven for those flooded out. The new EA mobile flood barrier had been utilised at Faversham., and the EA has the option to use these barriers in Ashford in key risk areas..
- (h) Aspire will work with East Kent Engineering Partnership in Canterbury for structural issues and should sign shortly a co-operation Agreement with the River Stour IDB
- (i) The Ashford Water Group was set up by Ashford's Future and came about as Ashford was designated as a growth area . It produced the Ashford Integrated Water Management Strategy.
- (j) Ashford SUDS SPD has been in place since 2010 and is still robust and effective in managing surface water flood risk. KCC are now working towards producing a template of a SuDS System for all authorities within the county and could amend our current SPD taking into account of local variations The aim currently is to typically achieve a 41/s/ha run off depending on sitetype and character. Policies had been undated to take account of climate change guidance.
- (k) Tom Reid advised on the EA's approach to biodiversity.

6. Full minutes of the meetings are published online.

7 In the course of our deliberations it became apparent that the public generally are not always aware of flooding risks and the group would like to see steps taken to improve their perception. We therefore recommend that

- (A) The "Report It" App be improved so that residents can report water incidents to the appropriate authority.
- (B) ABC should ensure that we support other agencies in their efforts to educate the public on their responsibilities especially in ditch clearing and invasive species.
- (C) We would also like to ask that links are provided and highlighted on the ABC homepage to agencies dealing with flooding issues.
- (D) There should be a robust method of monitoring the Aspire work in maintaining waterways etc for which ABC is responsible.

8 The overarching conclusion of this task group is that the networking opportunities that our meetings gave were extremely useful to all parties where they were able to exchange new ways of working and the new technologies available to the advantage of Ashford. That this continued co-operation should be recognised and extended

- 9 Thus, during the course of these meetings it became evident that this task group and the Ashford Water Group had very similar aims. It is therefore recommended that its terms of reference should be amended to make it a formal committee and encompass a wider membership and this group absorbed into a restructured Ashford Water Group

Aline Hicks

28th March 2017