

Meeting of the Joint Meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

Monday, 18 March 2024, 10.00 am

Committee Members present

Councillor Emma Baker
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing
Councillor Pam Byrd
Councillor Richard Dixon-Warren
Councillor Tim Harrison
Councillor Robert Leadenham
Councillor Bridget Ley
Councillor Nikki Manterfield
Councillor Paul Martin
Councillor Virginia Moran
Councillor Charmaine Morgan
Councillor Habibur Rahman
Councillor Ian Selby
Councillor Sarah Trotter
Councillor Vanessa Smith

Cabinet Members

Councillor Patsy Ellis
Councillor Ashley Baxter
Councillor Rhys Baker
Councillor Richard Cleaver

Officers

Karen Bradford, Chief Executive
Nicola McCoy-Brown, Director of Growth and Culture
Richard Wyles, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer
Graham Watts, Assistant Director (Governance and Public Protection) and Monitoring Officer
Sarah McQueen, Head of Service (Housing Options)
Chris Prime, Communications Manager

14. Election of Chairman

The meeting was opened at 1001 by the Democratic Services Manager, and with the agreement of those Members present in the Council Chamber, the meeting was **ADJOURNED** until 1015 to allow those Members that had been held up by an incident on the A1 to arrive for the meeting.

The meeting reconvened at 1015 and having been moved and seconded, and following a vote it was **AGREED** that Councillor Nikki Manterfield, Chairman of the Rural and Communities Overview and Scrutiny would be the Chairman for this Extraordinary meeting.

15. Election of Vice - Chairman

Having been moved and seconded, and following a vote, it was **AGREED** that Councillor Ian Selby, the Chairman of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be the Vice-Chairman for this Extraordinary meeting.

16. Public Speaking

There were no public speakers.

17. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from:

Councillor Steven Cunnington
Councillor Penny Milnes
Councillor Murray Turner

Councillors Harrish Bisnauthsing, Richard Dixon-Warren and Tim Harrison were present as substitutes.

18. Disclosure of interests

There were no disclosures of interests.

19. South Kesteven District Council's response to localised flood relating to Storm Henk

The Leader of the Council introduced the report detailing the response to 'Storm Henk'. The need for the meeting had arisen as the Deputy Leader had asked the Chairmen of both the Rural and Communities and Environment

Overview and Scrutiny Committees to suggest a debrief following the events of Storm Henk. As the topic of flooding was relevant to the two Committees, it was felt that a Joint Meeting was the best way forward.

Sympathy for all residents impacted by the flooding was expressed, alongside thanks to officers who had been involved with setting up an incident management room. Thanks were also extended to the Chief Executive, Corporate Management Team, and Streetscene for the roles they had played. Staff from almost every team across the Council had been involved in helping with the floor relief.

The Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture was also highlighted as someone who had ensured the smooth running of the floor relief effort to residents.

Unprecedented levels of flood water had been seen in the district due to Storm Henk coming so soon after the impact of Storm Babet. Within an ordinary year, there were not a high instance of floods, but due to the sheer number of floods provoked by Storms Babet and Henk, several were being investigated under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. Approximately 800 properties had been flooded.

The Monitoring Officer presented slides outlining the impact of the flooding. The following points were highlighted during the presentation:

- Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) was the lead flood authority in Lincolnshire and had the statutory responsibility for Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. LCC also employed an Emergency Planning Team.
- The Lincolnshire Resilience Forum (LRF) was a collective of Category 1 and 2 responders as identified in the Civil Contingencies Act. It included all of the Lincolnshire districts, LCC, emergency services, flood agencies, internal drainage boards and others.
- The LRF monitored the emerging flooding situation on a County wide basis. They liaised with the LCC Emergency Planning Team and following this a Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG) and a Tactical Co-Ordination Group (YCG) was set up. The first meeting of the SCG was on 2 January 2024, with the TCG meeting later on the same day. Meetings of those bodies continued for the rest of that week until Friday 5 January 2024.
- An emergency was not declared in South Kesteven that week, so South Kesteven District Council (SKDC) decided to proceed with an emergency planning group involving the Chief Executive and Directors. The emergency group met in Grantham at SK House and utilised staffing resource from other areas of the Council.
- The group relied heavily on intelligence from a range of sources including, but not limited to, Ward Members, public, Government live mapping system, flood alerts, and feedback from SCG and TCG and

other partners. A dedicated email account was established and was overseen by dedicated administrative support.

- Every area with a live flooding risk was given a profile.
- The storm caused extensive flooding to farmland and highways, as well as commercial and residential properties; five commercial premises were significantly impacted. There was also a list of areas where reports of internal flooding had been received. SKDC made immediate contact with every Council property that had reported experiencing internal flooding. In two instances families were placed in emergency accommodation and received daily welfare checks.
- The flooding initially greatly affected the villages of Tallington and Greatford, whilst also impacting Stamford.
- A 'Rest Centre' was set up with trained staff manning the establishment, until the decision was taken that it was no longer required. Once the situation in Tallington worsened, resource was diverted and the Rest Centre was relocated.
- In Greatford some residents could not access toilet facilities, so officers established contact with a portaloos provider. The Village Hall was also opened up in order that their facilities could be used. The Deepings Round Table also opened additional toilet facilities.
- Tallington Lodge Care Home's kitchen was flooded due to water coming up through the sink alongside general flooding and water ingress. The Council maintained communication with the Care Home in view of the vulnerability of tenants, however, the home took the decision to retain tenants in the premises as the flooding was isolated to the kitchen only. The Care Home therefore made alternative provision for food and water for its residents.
- An information leaflet was produced for residents, particularly in Greatford and Tallington, as there were a number of items that needed to be carefully disposed of as a result of the flood water. Feedback from this exercise had been positive.
- On Saturday 6 January 2024 inspections were carried out on those properties where internal flooding had been reported.

Further points were highlighted during debate between Members and officers:

- Surface water flooding was not predictable; however the areas prone to surface water flooding were now known. Informed planning to prepare for this was being made in some villages.
- Informed communications between the 'Control Centre' and Ward Councillors had to be part of the information link; visibility of LRF communications was essential.
- There was an on-call status for emergency planning for officers. In addition there was a WhatsApp group containing 30 senior officers and Emergency Planning Team Members which alerted them to any major incidents involving the Council. Even if events occurred over a

weekend or a Bank Holiday officers could be called into the office to deal with a situation.

- The Emergency Services were used for incidents where deeper water was involved; SKDC officers only had standard protection clothing and were not equipped to deal with such incidents. There were however volunteers that had the use of 4x4 vehicles.
- SKDC could have declared an 'emergency', but this would not have changed the response of the officers to the flooding situation. Had officers needed it, the support was there for mutual aid, but they were able to manage with partner support. In terms of funding, it was a Government decision as to when they made funding available for Local Authorities. District Councils could claim funding, subject to a threshold. However, whilst it had become more apparent with the passage of time that the flooding was widespread across Lincolnshire, many individuals at the time did not declare that their properties were flooded.
- Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue returned to normal operations on 3 January 2024.
- A lot of information was being shared through the Communications Manager by email, for ease. There were certainly lessons to be learned in terms of different means of communicating with Ward Members but it would be difficult to be adequately across many different forms of communication, especially with multiple alerts across the district.
- Storm information was taken from the Environment Agency and Met Office. In the build up to a storm there were hazard assessment teams. They decided how bad the storm could be and what needed to be done. Unfortunately, weather forecasting was still not that precise and it wasn't known exactly where storms would hit across Lincolnshire, however there were plans in place for these sorts of events. Planning was still reactive rather than proactive in terms of weather.
- LCC Emergency Planning Team were keen to work with community groups and had contacted all SKDC parish councils in October 2023 to work with them. It was an offer that SKDC followed up with a letter regarding sandbags for 'at risk' properties', which received a mixed response.
- In most cases, by the time a sandbag was deployed they were past their usefulness. Whilst they should be part of any flood response, they should not be relied upon. There were better products available for flood mitigation.
- The Chief Executive provided a £35,000 reserve through an Officer Delegated Decision to fund any works necessary as a result of the flooding. In addition, many were diverted away from their normal duties. The direct costs of the flooding to date, for items such as portaloos, skips and ancillaries was just over £5,500. However, this cost did not include the 100s of hours of staff time which was already budgeted for.
- South Kesteven was one of the worst hit districts in Lincolnshire with many different towns and villages being affected. Usually, disruption would be seen within East Lindsey given its low-lying areas, but this was not seen this time around.

- The Emergency Planning Team could only react to intelligence that had been confirmed; much of the information received by South Kesteven was very accurate.
- Issues with drainage should be reported to Lincolnshire Highways and Anglian Water.

The Monitoring Officer raised further points as part of his presentation:

- A number of areas had street cleaning arranged for 8 January. A co-ordinated waste collection included skips, and additional waste and bulky waste items collection.
- Following the flooding officers repeatedly contacted displaced families, and undertook welfare checks where necessary.
- The Government announced funding for the flood recovery network on 6 January. Any residents or businesses that were eligible for grant funding from the Government were contacted on 12 January. Where there were no contact details for groups or individuals social media was used to spread the message. Support included:
 - Community Recovery Grant
 - Business Recovery Grant
 - Council Tax Discount
 - Business Rates Relief
 - Property Flood Resilience Repair Grant Scheme
 - Farming Recovery Fund
- By 26 January direct contact had been made with 6 businesses and 41 residents. In total £73,000 of funding had been accepted. The issue of government funding would be reviewed week commencing 25 March.
- Remedial works as part of the cleanup operation were completed on 8 February. The cleanup and work of the Waste Services team was well received and helped areas return to normal.
- A review into where sandbags would be stored would take place, alongside reviewing whether there were better alternatives, such as 'aquabags'.
- Officers had committed to undertake further training in future. Some will be loggists, who will contribute to accurate information reporting.
- Flooding crossed several District Ward boundaries, so it was difficult to identify the most effective way to contact elected members. Text messaging groups could be investigated as part of any review; however, email forwarding was the favoured method of communication due to its ease – each member had a South Kesteven email account.
- Town and Parish Councils were encouraged to sign up for flood alerts, and to familiarise themselves with the LRF website and the implementation of emergency plans.

Further information was highlighted when summing up the report:

- Market Deeping managed to mitigate the flooding within the town. There were two alerts on the Government website related to the town. Officers were sent out to the area and built a profile in case the situation escalated. 140 filled sandbags were provided with another 80 available as a precaution.
- A 'business card' containing vital contact details could be created.
- To send sandbags into each village and town in the District would be an extremely costly exercise, a more targeted approach was suggested.
- Any member of the public could sign up as a volunteer and be trained to support emergency responders, the link was available on the LRF website. On the Government website any member of the public could sign up for flood warnings on mobile phones, emails or landline telephones.
- A host of vulnerable people would be contacted in emergencies through the Contact Support Group. This Group had a Memorandum of Understanding that could be shared in times of emergency.
- If sandbags had not been used then the towns and parishes could retain them for future use. If the sandbags had been impacted in any way by the flooding then they should be disposed of through SKDC. Usually sandbags have a lifespan of between 3-5 years.

Having been moved and seconded, and following a vote, it was **AGREED**:

1. That the content of the report be noted.
2. That the areas for improvement identified in the report be actioned by officers and incorporated into the Council's emergency planning procedures for any future incidents.
3. That the Joint Meeting recommend to Cabinet that a fund be made available for direct costs in relation to any emergency.
4. That a report be added to the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee workplan to investigate the options available to combat flooding in the future.

20. Any other business which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, decides is urgent

There was none.