

West Sussex Joint Scrutiny Steering Group

November 2015

West Sussex Joint Scrutiny Steering Group, Flooding Task & Finish Group

Report by Chairman of the Task and Finish Group

Executive Summary

The Task and Finish Group reconvened to:

1. Review progress made by the County Council and its partners in implementing the TFG's recommendations.
2. Review the response to any flood events occurring since the TFG last met.
3. Review the work undertaken under Operation Watershed

and make recommendations to the portfolio holders in each of West Sussex's local authorities, and external partners, as appropriate.

Recommendations

That the Group:

1. Is pleased with the progress made in implementing its recommendations, but notes that the County's drainage infrastructure has not been significantly tested by weather conditions since the 2012 events.
2. Notes that the original recommendations are live, and that work to achieve them is ongoing.
3. Endorses the County Council's proposal to employ two additional "full time equivalent" posts to work on statutory planning responses and related activities.
4. Is impressed with the success of Operation Watershed, particularly with work to engage and empower communities, and hopes that further funding will be made available to continue the scheme

1. Background and Methodology

- 1.1 The Task and Finish Group (TFG) was established in 2013 by the West Sussex Joint Scrutiny Steering Group to review the multi-agency responsibilities, roles, involvement in, and management of, major flooding incidents across West Sussex.

- 1.2 The TFG comprised eight elected non-executive members – one from each district and borough council within West Sussex, and one from the County Council. The TFG met twice – in October and November 2013 - to consider evidence and develop recommendations. The TFG published its report in December 2013.
- 1.3 The Joint Scrutiny Steering Group, considering the Group’s report, requested that the Group reconvene after an appropriate period of time, in order to:
 - a) Review progress made by the County Council and its partners in implementing the TFG’s recommendations.
 - b) Review the response to any flood events occurring since the TFG last met.
 - c) Review the work undertaken under Operation Watershed, the County Council’s response to the flooding events of 2012, a commitment to invest in highway drainage and environmental improvements in areas of West Sussex worst affected by floods.

The Group reconvened on 19 October 2015.

- 1.4 The TFG considered a report which set out the progress made by the County Council and its partners against each of its 11 original recommendations. The Group also heard evidence on the work of Operation Watershed, and on the response of all partners to flooding events since the Group last met. The Group heard evidence from the County Council’s Flood Risk Management Team, from the Resilience and Emergencies Team, and from the Project Manager of Operation Watershed

2. Discussion and Recommendations.

2.1 Progress Against the Original Recommendations:

2.1.1 The Group discussed issues which included the following:

- i. The challenges presented by the loss of key personnel, and the potential mitigation.
- ii. The process for enforcing compliance with their statutory duties among riparian landowners, and the effectiveness of this approach.
- iii. The scoring process for informing the work programme prioritisation process - its benefits and its shortcomings.
- iv. The impact of reduced staffing across the eight local authorities, and the additional activities that could be undertaken with more staff.
- v. The confidence members could have in the data collected on flooding incidence.

Recommendations

That the Group:

1. Is pleased with the progress made in implementing its recommendations, but notes that the County's drainage infrastructure has not been significantly tested by weather conditions since the 2012 events.
2. Notes that the original recommendations are live, and that work to achieve them is ongoing.
3. Endorses the County Council's proposal to employ two additional "full time equivalent" posts to work on statutory planning responses and related activities.

2.2 Flood Events since December 2013:

2.2.1 The Group discussed issues which included the following:

- i. The impact when fire services in neighbouring areas are restructured.
- ii. The anticipated impact on flood response following the recent restructure of West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service (FRS).
- iii. The likelihood that 35mm of rain falling over two hours in West Sussex would overwhelm most drainage systems, as happened in Brighton in July 2014.
- iv. The increased level of data collection undertaken by the FRS in respect of flooding incidents, and its dissemination.

2.3 Operation Watershed:

2.3.1 The Group discussed issues which included the following:

- i. How members could be assured that the money spent under Operation Watershed represented good value.
- ii. The effectiveness of local volunteers undertaking activities such as project management.
- iii. The relative success of projects funded with smaller value grants, compared to those funded with larger grants.

Recommendations

4. That the Group is impressed with the success of Operation Watershed, particularly with work to engage and empower communities, and hopes that further funding will be made available to continue the scheme

3. Next Steps

- 3.1 This report will be passed to the relevant Cabinet Members at each of West Sussex's local authorities, with a request that a written response to the Joint Scrutiny Steering Group be provided by the end of February 2016. For information, a copy of the report will be sent to the relevant overview and scrutiny committees in each of these authorities, and to the Joint Scrutiny Steering Group. The Joint Scrutiny Steering Group will forward the report to relevant partners it considers appropriate.
- 3.2 The report will be published on the County Council website
- 3.3 TFG members felt that the Group had fulfilled its terms of reference, and considered its work to be completed.

4. Resource Implications and Value for Money

- 4.1 Under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 the County Council has become the Local Lead Flood Authority. However, significant contributions (both in funding and wider resources) will need to be forthcoming from district and borough councils (as well as other parties) for flood risk to be positively managed in West Sussex.

5. Risk Management Implications

- 5.1 As well as the threat to life and health (both physical and psychological), flooding can result in extensive impact to property, communities, and businesses, and can have far-reaching economic impact.

6. Other Considerations – Equality – Crime Reduction – Human Rights

- 6.1 There are no implications for a local authority's duty to avoid or to reduce crime or anti-social behaviour, or to assist partners to do so.

There are no implications which compromise Human Rights. The proposals treat all members of the community equally.

TFG Membership

Roy Barraclough, Worthing Borough Council
Ann Bridges, Adur District Council
John Chidlow, Horsham District Council
Norman Dingemans, Arun District Council
Henry Potter, Chichester District Council
Geraint Thomas Crawley Borough Council
Colin Trumble, Mid-Sussex District Council
Graham Tyler, West Sussex District Council (Chairman)

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