

Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 10 October 2017

Present: Simon Tagg (Chairman)

Attendance

Ann Beech	Rev. Preb. M. Metcalf
Tina Clements	Jeremy Pert
Maureen Compton	David Smith
Keith Flunder	Bernard Williams
Julia Jessel (Vice-Chairman)	

Also in attendance: Mark Deaville and Helen Fisher

Apologies: Paul Woodhead and Candice Yeomans

PART ONE

54. Declarations of Interest

Jeremy Pert declared an interest in the item on Flood Risk Management as he was a member of Eccleshall Flood Management Group.

55. Minutes of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 12 September 2017

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee held on 12 September 2017 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

56. Update on Flood Risk Management

The Committee received a presentation and report from Hannah Burgess, Flood Risk Manager, on flood risk management arrangements in Staffordshire and new collaborative working for providing these services to other councils. The Environment Agency, who were key partners in managing flooding, were in attendance and were invited to participate in the discussion.

Following the severe flooding during the summer of 2007 and a number of legislative changes, the County Council became a Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA), with various powers and statutory duties to manage and co-ordinate local flood risk management activities. Local flood risk means flooding from surface water (overland runoff), groundwater and smaller watercourses (known as Ordinary Watercourses). The County Council did this by working together with other organisations including the Environment Agency, which managed flooding from generally larger rivers (known as Main Rivers, such as the River Trent); the Sow and Penk Internal Drainage Board (IDB) managing low lying areas around Stafford; District, Borough, Parish and Town Councils; and

infrastructure/utility providers, such as Severn Trent Water, United Utilities and Highways England.

There were both strategic and operational elements to the role of LLFA. Strategically, the Council needed to develop, maintain, apply and monitor a Local Flood Risk Management Strategy. Operationally, the Council investigated flooding incidents, held a flood risk management asset database, and had powers to designate third party assets where they had an impact on flood risk. The Council also regulated land drainage activities, including consenting to works and enforcement on Ordinary Watercourses outside of the Sow and Penk IDB area. Additionally, in 2015 the LLFA became a statutory consultee for major planning applications for sustainable drainage designs.

In April 2017, the County Council had entered into Service Level Agreements with Walsall Council, the City of Wolverhampton Council and Sandwell Council to provide flood risk management services on their behalf. This would generate an income of around £0.5m over the next three years. To provide these services, the Flood Risk Management Team had restructured and increased its capacity by 2.2 FTEs. The Business Case put forward had allowed the Team to offer a £30k/year saving in its revenue budget for the next three years.

Members were informed that local flood alleviation schemes were primarily funded by national Flood Defence Grant in Aid that the County Council could bid for. The process of allocating and accessing this funding was incredibly complex. The amount of funding allocated rarely covered the full cost of a scheme as it was mainly based on the number of houses protected rather than the scheme cost. To top up funding so that a scheme could proceed, the Council need to seek contributions from regional flood alleviation funds, local authorities, other flood management partners, other funding streams such as environmental projects, and the businesses and communities that were at risk of flooding. This system was known as “Partnership Funding”. Experience to date was that additional funding was challenging to find for small projects. The Council had had some success in securing regional flood alleviation funds, known as Local Levy, but this fund was now limited and fully allocated within the River Trent catchment until 2021.

The Committee considered case studies of schemes in Kidsgrove, Endon and Rugeley, together with details of future schemes which were planned. The Council was opening a bidding scheme for communities to deliver Small Scale Flood Alleviation Projects within Staffordshire for 2017/18. Applications could be made for up to £5,000 per location to be used for works, studies or projects that would mitigate known flood risk in an area. The grant would be available to Town Councils, Borough and District Councils, Parish Councils, Community Groups and Flood Action Groups. Applications would have to be submitted by 30 November 2017 and the vast majority of these grants would be externally funded through Local Levy.

Members were informed of the work that was being undertaken in relation to land drainage. There were nearly 8,000 culverts in the County and the exact location and condition of much of these is unknown. A lack of regular maintenance coupled with the age of many of the assets, in many cases over 100 years, meant that the culvert network was vulnerable to blockage and failure.

In April 2015 the LLFA became a statutory consultee to the planning process. When considering planning applications for major developments, Local Planning Authorities must consult the County Council on the management of surface water. Whilst the Council were not under a statutory duty to respond to non-major applications, a risk based system had been developed for LPAs to send applications at highest risk of localised flooding. Preventing properties being built in high flood risk areas would always be the most effective form of flood risk management.

In May 2016 the Committee had considered a paper which explored how prepared the County Council was to deal with a major flood event. Members received an update on these arrangements, together with a schedule of Flood Risk Management Priorities for 2017/18, including the establishment of local flood risk management groups in some areas. Members requested more specific timescales and outcomes in relation to the priorities.

In wide ranging discussion members shared experiences from their localities. In doing so, they queried what the role of the local member was in the event of a major flood. They were informed that members could contribute their local knowledge and also support communications. Information on their role in an emergency was available on the Members' Intranet, but it was suggested that a "crib Sheet" containing key facts and contact numbers could be provided for members.

Members expressed concern over the impact that local planning and development decisions were having on flooding, and a perception that consideration of feedback from consultees was a tick box exercise when flooding could have a significant personal and economic impact. In response to advice on reporting issues to Water Companies, concern was expressed over a poor response from Severn Trent, which had resulted in a resident having to vacate their property for six months. It was suggested that it would be helpful to invite a representative to a future meeting of the Committee. In relation to a number of local concerns raised by members, they were requested to report issues to the flood risk management team in order for these to be included on the digital mapping system. It was confirmed that the team used two key sets of flood modelling on a daily basis, on surface water and water courses. In response to a question on landowners' responsibilities, members were informed that where a landowner had a water course on their land it was their responsibility to maintain it. The Council was responsible for issuing consent for new structures and carrying out an enforcement role.

In conclusion, the Chairman suggested that it may be helpful to present the Flood Risk Management Priorities in a similar way to that which was adopted for performance reports in the past, using a green, amber and red traffic light system. The Cabinet Member for Commercial undertook to contact Severn Trent with a view to a further update on partnership working to involve the utility companies, and also to review the role of the Council as a statutory consultee on planning matters.

RESOLVED - That:

- a) The progress with regard to the County Council's responsibilities as Lead Local Flood Authority for Staffordshire be noted;
- b) The collaborative working arrangements for providing flood risk management services to Walsall, Sandwell and Wolverhampton Councils be noted;

- c) Progress on local flood alleviation schemes, and the challenges that the national Partnership Funding system presents for small schemes be noted, and a call for government to simplify the process for funding local food alleviation works be supported;
- d) The update on preparation for a severe flood event, as discussed at the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee in May 2016, be received;
- e) The Flood Risk Management Priorities be revised to include specific timescales and outcomes;
- f) A Flood Risk Management “Crib Sheet” containing key facts and contact numbers be provided for all Members;
- g) The Cabinet Member will contact Severn Trent Water with a view to obtaining an update on partnership working with the Utility Companies and a representative be invited to attend the next meeting when Flood Risk Management is discussed; and
- h) The Cabinet Member will review the role of the Council as a statutory consultee on planning matters.

57. Work Programme

The Select Committee received a copy of their 2017/18 Work Programme.

As outlined in the Work Programme, a briefing note had been circulated to members on the Staffordshire History Centre, and Joanna Terry, Head of Archives was in attendance to answer questions. A further, more detailed briefing including plans was brought to the meeting. Members agreed that this was an exciting new development which was an asset to the County and should be given more emphasis and a higher profile. They requested that they be given the opportunity to have a tour around the History Centre, to enable them to be greater advocates for the service and also asked that the details tabled at the meeting be circulated to all members via the e-bulletin.

RESOLVED – That:

- a) The Work Programme for 2017/18 be noted;
- b) The progress on the Staffordshire History Centre be noted; and
- c) Members of the Select Committee be invited to a guided tour of the Centre.

Chairman