



18/05/21

Dear Councillor Parry,

Scrutiny of Local Flood Risk Management Strategy

We understand that your committee is responsible for “the scrutiny of highways infrastructure and connectivity and flood and water management”.

This was brought to the attention of the Eccleshall Flood Action Group by one of our members who has taken the trouble to review all the minutes of your committee since October 2015, when the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy was signed off by Cabinet. The objective of the investigation was to try to discover why flood problems in Eccleshall and Slindon were not being acted upon.

I have attached the report which was presented to the Eccleshall Flood Action Group, and which you will see indicates that there appears to have been very little scrutiny of:

- the flood management team employed by the Council
- progress in regard to the strategy and its scheduled update
- remedial activities during or after the recent floods of 2019, 2020 or 2021;
- the effect of the change to the Highways approach to drain cleaning - moving from the proven system of routine maintenance to one of ‘risk-based’ actions.

We would urge the Committee to consider the following actions:

1. Ensure that flood prevention strategy and flood remediation work is returned to the Work Programme for 2021/22.
2. Publish key information about the impact of the 4 recent flood events in:
 - a. October 2019
 - b. February 2020
 - c. August 2020
 - d. January 2021

To quantify and publish for each event:

- Number of taxpayer’s homes flooded within each event
- Number of taxpayer’s homes flooded 1,2,3 or 4 times
- Number of taxpayer’s homes where remedial plans have been agreed
- Number of taxpayer’s homes where remedial plans have been completed.
- Number of serious/serial road flooding events



- Action plans agreed / implemented for road flooding.
- 3. Based on the above information, consider whether the thresholds for an investigation by the LLFA are appropriate (internal flooding of 5 residential properties or 2 business properties). This ignores frequency of flooding occurrence and discriminates against rural properties.
- 4. Publish details of foul water discharged untreated into watercourses by water companies across the County (as highlighted in the Panorama programme).
- 5. Take up the proposal of *one of your members* in July 2019 to “look at potential issues around sewers, including capacity, their impact on flooding, and the compatibility of aging pipework

with new builds.” This is particularly important as local authorities start work on the new local plans, and it is a particular problem in Eccleshall.

- 6. Connected to the above, to publish the capacity of each sewage works so that this information is readily available to all groups when considering new housing developments.
- 7. Ensure publication of the ‘critical road network’ mentioned by Hannah Burgess in October 2017.
- 8. Request an impact assessment of the 2017 change to the gulley emptying programme – this approach has clearly not been effective in Eccleshall and is likely to have contributed to the problems.
- 9. Agree a timetable for a revised edition of the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy – which is based on the evidence of the floods of 2019, 2020 and 2021 and other information outlined above.

As Mark Winnington said when he launched the strategy “Flooding can have a devastating effect on communities”.

We would be most appreciative if the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee would use its powers to ensure that the flood management team delivers results in the form of infrastructure improvements – before the next flash flood is upon us.

Yours sincerely,

Stuart Perren

Chairman of Eccleshall Flood Action Group

The Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee and Scrutiny of the County Flood Strategy 2015 ... Or lack of scrutiny 2017-2021!

The County Council

"as a Lead Local Flood Authority, we are required by law to develop, maintain, apply and monitor a Local Flood Risk Management Strategy."

<http://moderngov.staffordshire.gov.uk/mglIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=43771>

The Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee is responsible for scrutiny of achievement against the Council's strategic ambitions for promoting prosperity and economic growth.

The committee is also responsible for the scrutiny of highways infrastructure and connectivity and flood and water management. In addition, the committee will be responsible for priorities around education, learning and skills. As such the statutory education co-optees will sit on this committee.

The word 'scrutiny' is defined as "1. a searching study, inquiry, or inspection : examination. 2: a searching look. 3: close watch; surveillance."

Great news, so our elected members will be looking closely into how taxpayers' money is spent and what is being achieved to ensure we don't suffer the devastating effects of flooding!

How closely has the County Flood Strategy been monitored and scrutinised?

So, it was with great excitement, that I was able to explore the minutes of the meetings of this committee, and present my findings for you here:

Date	Action	Comments
21 Oct 2015	Community Impact Assessment	
21 Oct 2015	Flood strategy signed off by cabinet	
	<p>Flooding can have a devastating impact on communities and the local economy and the new strategy is a step forward in managing and minimising flood risk. This is about better coordination, planning and supporting people and business in understanding flooding risk and reducing it.</p> <p>By working with Shropshire Council we can use our resources as effectively as possible and share expertise. Our aim is to give people a better insight into preventing flood risk and alleviate problems by working with people or organisations that may be responsible. New legislation will also mean new developments must have adequate drainage systems and therefore reduce flooding risk."</p> <p>Mark Winnington, Cabinet Member for Economy, Environment and Transport.</p>	
<p>No activity for seven months. A bit slow off the starting blocks!</p>		
24 May 2016	PSSC first briefed on the strategy	Initial discussion – not much scrutiny.
May 2017	Annual update to PSSC scheduled, but no meeting so moved to June 2017	
June 2017	Annual update to PSSC scheduled, but meeting was cancelled so moved to Sept 2017	

Sept 2017	Annual update to PSSC scheduled, but moved to October 2017	Two years since launch Is this adequate monitoring? Is this an acceptable level of scrutiny?
10 Oct 2017	<p>Hannah Burgess came and gave a pretty comprehensive report with an action plan with a clear indication of the status of the various activities.</p> <p>It was a good start, but a bit lacking in specific details so the members asked for more detail and a copy of the priorities for 2017/18.</p> <p>Two of the actions in progress were:</p> <p>C. Identifying the critical road network to ensure it is as resilient as practical to extreme weather conditions [no specifics],</p> <p>D. Taking forward a new gulley emptying cycle that takes a risk-based approach. The Flood Risk Management Team have supported SCC Highways with this work by providing data and information and feeding into asset lifecycle plans [</p>	<p>It was concerning to read that the team was also servicing Walsall, Wolverhampton and Sandwell</p> <p>How would this benefit residents in Staffordshire? Other than diluting our already thin resources?</p> <p>C. How was the A519 in Slindon categorised? It was flooded in 2007 and 2012 – so was a known problem area.</p> <p>D: what was recorded for the A519 in Slindon, as flooded in 2007 and 2012 – so a known problem area.</p> <p>No details shared <u>or requested</u> by the PSSC.</p>
This appeared to be a good report, and so I was keen to see the update on Hannah's action plan and greater scrutiny as the PSSC got to grips with the issues.		
Nov 17 to Apr 2018	No further mention of flooding	
June 2018	The 2018/19 Work Plan was issued, without any mention of flooding except on the cover page.	Who decided there was no need for monitoring or scrutiny?
July 18 to April 2019	No further mention	How did the PSSC think flood preparations were going?
June 2019	The 2019/20 Work Plan was issued, without any mention of flooding except on the cover page.	Who decided there was no need for monitoring or scrutiny?
26 July 2019	A member (<i>no name recorded but bless him or her</i>) suggested "the committee should look at potential issues around sewers, including capacity, their impact on flooding, and the compatibility of aging pipework with new builds".	No evidence of follow up.
Sept 2019	PSSC meeting cancelled	
3 Oct 2019	No mention of flooding in work plan except on the cover page.	Was the PSSC confident that residents were 'safe, happy and supported by their community against flooding'?
<p>25-29 October 2019 SEVERE FLOODS in North Staffs https://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/news/gallery/flooding-north-staffordshire-october-25-3468552 Surely, they will discuss it at the next meeting?</p>		
Nov 2019	PSSC meeting cancelled	Over two years since flood strategy last discussed
January 2020	Meeting takes place – no mention of flooding in the minutes.	Really??

<p>15 February 202 – STORM DENNIS batters Staffordshire https://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/news/stoke-on-trent-news/storm-dennis-hits-north-staffordshire-3851330 Surely, they will discuss it at the next meeting?</p>		
26 Feb 2020	PSSC meeting cancelled	Why? No Covid restrictions yet.
16 April 2020	PSSC meeting cancelled	Why? Most people using Zoom by then
18 June 2020	Work programme for 2020/21 discussed after two serious flood events.	Surely, they will remember their duty and put flooding back on the work programme?
24 July 2020	New work programme for 2020/21 No mention of flooding except on the cover page.	YES, Really!
<p>12 August 2020 – Eccleshall High Street becomes a river https://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/news/stoke-on-trent-news/watch-astonishing-moment-high-street-4420844 Third time lucky? Maybe this will wake the PSSC up to their duty!</p>		
17 Sept 2020	<p>The Flood Officer (sadly not Hannah from 2017) was invited to present: Click here for video recording</p> <p>Rather than updating the committee with any hard facts or details of projects and progress, it appeared that the officer simply provided an overview from the strategy of 2015, and spent the rest of a lengthy presentation complaining about the complexity of his work (which is the whole reason for having a LLFA!).</p> <p>He only mentioned projects which Hannah had mentioned in 2017.</p> <p>He said there were only 10 instances where more that 5 properties were affected.</p> <p>Members simply clarified their own understanding of complex issues.</p> <p>Lead Officer: David Walters James Bailey Jamie Cooper</p> <p>The Information/Action/Outcome from meeting was just: "Noted and copy of slides requested"</p>	<p>Three years since last scrutiny meeting and three floods later!</p> <p>It was clear this committee (which had a specific objective to scrutinise flood issues) was not very au fait with strategy or very concerned about the details.</p> <p>No one requested <u>any information</u> on the impact of the three recent flood events.</p> <p>There was no review of any work completed or work planned.</p> <p>No question regarding the 'new' risk-based gulley programme (the timing of which coincides with the three highway flooding incidents). Could it be that it is not working?</p> <p>No one asked about taxpayers whose floods are not being investigated.</p> <p>Unfortunately, there were no probing questions and little expectation of any results.</p> <p>No questions regarding whether the plan was up to date or when it would be updated?</p> <p>The officers were not held to account.</p>
	Is anything else in the work programme for 2020/21?	NO - What a surprise!

