

# Overview and Scrutiny

Meeting date: 25 March 2024

## Member Questions on Flood Risk Management Overview (Agenda item 7)

### 1. Question from Councillor Jackie Chelin

Many thanks for the comprehensive and detailed report which provides an excellent overview of the many activities relating to flood risk, and the (seeming) complexity of the situation regarding the number of partners and stakeholders involved.

To what extent has the workload of planning officers increased, in recent years, to accommodate addressing drainage matters in the course of their roles?

#### **Answer:**

Thank you for your compliments on the report and questions.

With regards to resource allocated to planning, in 2020 the previous CBC flood engineer estimated that 10% of their full-time equivalent time was being spent on planning consultations. It is likely that prior to 2017 this would have been even less. The Joint-Core-Strategy (JCS) adopted in 2017 includes a requirement for any new development to incorporate Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) where appropriate in the view of the local authority (Policy INF2, 2 iv).

Between 2020 and October 2022, flood risk and drainage consultations for non-major developments were sub-contracted to the Publica flood risk management team. Whilst this reduced CBC resource requirements, costs were incurred through the technical support contract. In October 2022 the Publica flood risk management team said they could not offer any further support to CBC due to their own resourcing constraints and their team has not grown in capacity since.

Planning is currently estimated to be 50% full-time equivalent workload for the CBC flood risk officer. With projected growth in Cheltenham and the government announcement of implementation of schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management act in 2024, this workload could increase in the future. In national policies, developers are currently only required to include SUDS on major developments (10 dwellings or more). Schedule 3 is likely to broaden this to apply to smaller developments. Due to the existing local JCS policy that covers non-major development this change may not be as significant locally compared to some areas of the country, but full details of Schedule 3 are yet to be announced and it is

therefore not clear how GCC (as the Lead Local Flood Authority) will resource or delegate any additional duties.

## **2. Question from Councillor Jackie Chelin**

Given that resources are presumably tight, as with all local authorities, how are decisions made about prioritisation of activities (outside emergency situations, of course) and what specific threats are envisaged in the next few years that might lead to the need to seek increased funding for staffing?

### **Answer:**

Asset management has been prioritised in the first full year of the new team, to ensure CBC assets are fit for purpose, to ensure we are aware of which assets CBC is responsible for (as this was previously not catalogued), and failure of these assets could incur significant financial and reputational risk to CBC in addition to flood risk to the public. We are therefore prioritising incorporating our asset inspections and condition surveys into the CBC risk framework.

Elsewhere we are careful to ensure resource allocated to investigations, enquiries, and flood schemes are fitting with our strategy, proportional to the actual amount of flood risk involved, and are forwarded to the relevant authority if it is a matter where CBC has minimal influence/duties.

Threats to resourcing in the next few years include skill shortages in the industry. Due to the growth and awareness of flooding in planning and climate adaption there is a rising demand for skills and competition with the private sector for recruitment and retention of staff. Climate change also poses a threat, even in the next few years, as we are already experiencing changes to our weather patterns which will likely lead to an increase in reactive duties.

## **3. Question from Councillor Jackie Chelin**

The opportunity for “future bids for public funding in the ....area” is mentioned on page 21 and I wondered what sort of opportunities these might be and how successful such bidding has proved, in the past.

### **Answer:**

Cheltenham has been relatively successful in securing funding for flood schemes through the Environment Agency and GCC due to clear evidence of flood risk from records of the 2007 floods and modelling. This includes schemes that mitigate risk to heritage buildings. But it will likely be more difficult to secure further funding through these traditional routes, especially for larger schemes in areas/wards that have already received significant funding.

Property Flood Resilience (PFR) and flood recovery grants are also available, usually to buildings that have recently flooded. With heritage buildings, property level resilience measures and repair works need to be balanced against the conservation values of the building.

More recently funding opportunities from other sources have included:

- Sustainable drainage (SUDS) retrofit projects through Severn Trent Water. We recently submitted a business case for a proposed scheme which was not successful due to higher priority projects elsewhere in the region which were shown to have greater benefit to the Severn Trent Water network. There are opportunities elsewhere in Cheltenham to explore that may have greater benefit to the sewer network though.
- An insurance company (MORE THAN) have recently provided funding to the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust to deliver Natural Flood Management (NFM) and SUDS in Gloucester and Cheltenham. CBC are supporting their delivery of some of these schemes.
- The Environment Agency recently awarded £25 million to 40 NFM projects nationwide.

Our plan is to develop a portfolio of potential projects so we can be in a position to turnaround a business case in the short time windows that these funding application opportunities usually offer.

#### **4. Question from Councillor Jackie Chelin**

What are the specific social, economic and environmental benefits mentioned in strategic objective 2 (p 18 of the document) and how are these promoted to the wider public to ensure ongoing engagement in efforts to manage flood risk?

Flood schemes such as Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) and Natural Flood Management (NFM) can have social benefits including mental well-being and health through techniques such as urban greening, connection to water, community gardens, tree-planting, and amenity river restoration features. Recreation opportunities can also be incorporated such as walking/cycling routes and improved amenity features to encourage such activities. There are also UK examples where SUDS have been designed into playgrounds (play pumps/water channels etc.) and to harvest water for use on allotment sites and community gardens/orchards. Stress incurred by living in a flood risk area can also be relieved through knowledge that a flood alleviation scheme is operational.

Economic benefits are usually associated with mitigation of flood damages and these benefits are sometimes quantified for larger schemes with modelling (comparison of potential damages with and without a proposed flood defence in place) as part of the funding and options appraisal process for a scheme.

SUDS and NFM schemes can create habitat/biodiversity and often improve water quality by allowing contaminants from road surfaces (oils, tyre particles etc.) to breakdown more naturally before entering watercourses. They can also improve river and groundwater health by allowing water to infiltrate into the ground. Some devices can also include water re-use and NFM techniques can create or preserve natural carbon stores through good floodplain management.

Risk management authorities have promoted such benefits to the wider public through display boards (Cox's Meadow flood alleviation scheme and the new SUDS feature at Naunton Park have these for example).

The CBC infographic "*Green your property to reduce flooding in your community*" which has been delivered to one thousand houses in Warden Hill by the parish council includes engagement on this (see screenshot below) and CBC are also working on similar infographics with GCC to support comms for proposed SUDS scheme (raingardens) on Cromwell Road.

There is still more that can be done in this space, and we welcome any ideas and support councillors can offer to raise public awareness of the multi-benefits such flood alleviation schemes can offer to communities.

## GREEN YOUR PROPERTY TO REDUCE FLOODING IN YOUR COMMUNITY WHILST SAVING ON WATER BILLS AND HELPING NATURE!

### 1 Water Butts

Water butts collect and store rainwater. A water butt can collect around 5,000 litres a year. This water can be repurposed allowing drinking water to be preserved. As a result, you can save money on your water bill and reduce your household carbon emissions. Furthermore, rainwater is much better for your plants!

Discover if you are eligible for free products and discounted butts by scanning the QR code



Or visit [getwaterfit.co.uk](http://getwaterfit.co.uk)

