

Division(s):

## **CABINET – 13 MAY 2014**

### **Draft Local Flood Risk Management Strategy**

#### **Report by Director for Economy & Environment**

#### **Introduction**

1. Following the nationwide flooding events of 2007, the Pitt Review recommended that a single authority should be responsible for managing flood risk in local areas. This was endorsed by subsequent legislation, the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, under which Oxfordshire County Council became the Lead Local Flood Authority for the County.
2. As part of its role as the Lead Flood Authority the council is required to produce, publish and maintain a Local Flood Risk Management Strategy.
3. The purpose of the strategy is to state how the county council, in conjunction with other flood and water management authorities intend to work together effectively in order to manage areas identified as being at risk of flooding within the county.
4. Whilst the county council is the Lead Flood Authority, other authorities continue to retain their previous responsibilities (i.e. county council –highway drainage, Highways Agency – highway drainage for A34 and M40, City/ District Councils – planning and land drainage, Environment Agency – main rivers, national strategic overview and flood warning service, Thames Water - main sewage system).
5. An Oxfordshire Strategic Flooding Group and Operational sub Group have been established comprised of relevant partners, to ensure that there is a synergy between each authority's approach to flooding and that there is joint ownership of a strategy.
6. A Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment was produced to provide a high level overview of the flood risk within the county and to inform the mitigation requirements within the strategy.
7. A draft strategy (Annex 1) has been developed in conjunction with officers from the City and District Councils and the Environment Agency and is now at a stage to seek broader feedback through public consultation. The Highways Agency has not been involved in developing the strategy as the preliminary flood risk assessment did not identify any risks to flooding on the strategic road network.

8. The strategy is part of the overall vision for a 'Thriving Oxfordshire' and directly contributes to 'Thriving People and Communities' in the corporate plan.
9. The strategy has also included the feedback from the Members Flood Forum and the Flood Summit.
10. Following the flooding in 2007, which resulted from the wettest May-July period on record, the county council put in place a number of measures to reduce the risk of flooding. These included working with riparian owners to improve drainage and encouraging the development of local resilience plans to enable communities to develop their own flood defences.
11. Although no two flood events are the same the impact on households in 2013/14, including the wettest January on record, meant fewer than 170 homes flooded, compared to 3000 in 2007. In 2007, 600 residents had to be evacuated, compared to 32 in 2013/14.

### **Key Issues**

12. Flooding is a sensitive issue within the county with regular property flooding events having occurred over the past ten years and two major flooding events within the same time period.
13. The production of a strategy will raise public expectations at the same time as each authority, as well as DEFRA and DfT, are coming under significant budgetary pressures which is likely to mean that there is significantly less money or opportunity to address public concerns to the expected level.
14. Whilst the county council is the lead flood authority and 'owns' the strategy, the council has very little power in ensuring other authorities engage with the strategy or deliver against identified actions.
15. The successful delivery of the strategy will be dependent on each authority continuing to support the overarching approach both from a cultural and financial perspective. Should this not be the case the reputation of the county council could be detrimentally impacted.

### **Consultation**

16. It is proposed that the strategy be the subject of a broader public consultation for a minimum period of 12 weeks to enable appropriate feedback and challenge to the strategy to be considered for inclusion within the final document. This will be made available through the county council's consultation portal and through direct mailings to key stakeholders including, districts and parish/town councils.
17. It is proposed to hold consultation potentially from June to the end of September to allow for the school holidays.

## **Financial and Staff Implications**

18. The strategy has no immediate budgetary implications as DEFRA have provided a grant to enable the county to develop a strategy and undertake the additional responsibilities of being the Lead Local Flood Authority.
19. It has recently been confirmed that this grant will continue to be made available until at least 2015/16 albeit with a £55k pressure for that year. It is not anticipated that this pressure will have a significant impact on service delivery as new income should be realised through Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) approvals which legislation will enable the county council to charge for from mid-2014. A separate paper will be submitted to Cabinet.
20. As part of this strategy the council would need to maintain revenue investment in highway drainage and gulley maintenance. There are however no current proposals to reduce the levels of service in this area.
21. There will continue to be a need for capital investment in highway drainage improvement schemes either as individual projects or as part of a contribution to broader drainage schemes in partnership with others. These will need to be considered on a case by case basis through the annual Capital Programme setting process.
22. The majority of minor flooding issues have now been addressed and the potential schemes outstanding are ones where a considerable investment would be required either as part of a highway drainage scheme undertaken by the authority itself or as a contribution to a broader scheme as part of a joint approach with others.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

23. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to approve the Draft Local Flood Risk Management Strategy for Public Consultation.**

SUE SCANE  
Director for Economy and Environment

Background papers: None

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