

GROWTH & INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 17 FEBRUARY 2010

FLOODING REVIEW – PROGRESS UPDATE

Report by Head of Transport

Summary

1. Since the flooding that took place in July 2007 there have been a number of government reviews, initiatives and legislation that have been produced which have or will give additional responsibilities to Local Authorities. These include:
 - The Pitt Review
 - The draft Flood and Water Management Bill
 - The Water Framework Directive
 - Local Government Performance Framework - NI 189
2. In the Pitt Review there were a number of recommendations for local authorities and the progress against these are being updated on a regular basis by means of reports which are submitted to both Defra and the Home Office but also to the Growth & Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee. All of the recommendations in the Pitt Review have been included in the Flood and Water Management Bill which is currently progressing through Parliament.
3. The attached report outlines the progress made, the current position and the details of the work still to be undertaken in Oxfordshire in the area of Flood Risk Management as a result of recent and anticipated legislation. This is intended to provide this committee with an up to date position.

The Report

4. Following the 2007 floods Oxfordshire County Council formed the Oxfordshire Longer Term Flood Issues Group (OLTFIG). This was essentially a group comprising senior officers from the County, Districts, Environment Agency and Thames Water. The purpose of the group was to review the flooding that had taken place and strategically plan responses in preparation for any such future events.
5. The group quickly became focussed on the draft Flood and Water Management Bill consultation and served to collate Oxfordshire's response to it. The group has also made joint responses in relation to progress concerning the Pitt Review recommendations all of which have been included in the new bill.
6. The focus of the county wide group has recently been strengthened by the appointment of a Flood Group Coordinator. This has enabled the group to

develop Terms of Reference and also to consider the strategy and longer term action planning for the coordination of Flood Management activities. Also, as a result of new and imminent legislation in the area of flooding the group has re evaluated itself and has now transformed into the Oxfordshire Strategic Flooding Group (OSFG) in order to prepare strategically for the changes that will soon occur when delivering land drainage and flood risk reduction services.

7. This is seen as the appropriate forum at which strategic partnership working should be discussed at officer level. The Environment Agency has endorsed this approach as best practice and are hoping this model can be replicated elsewhere in the country. The county council has recently taken over the chairmanship of this group which is in line with its role under the forthcoming legislation. In addition there is also a member group which brings together portfolio holders from each of the authorities and this is chaired by Cllr Ian Hudspeth. This group aims to meet at least annually to discuss progress of the officer group.
8. Flooding groups have also been established in each district area and are working to manage flood risks with relevant partners at an operational level. The countywide group provides the strategic overview of activities.
9. In anticipation of the Flood and Water Management Bill being enacted work has already commenced in the following areas:
 - Assessing resources
 - Information sharing across partner organisations
 - Compilation and coordination of drainage information
 - Identifying timelines for when activities need to be completed
 - Determining the cross cutting elements of these activities across the county council
 - Identifying best practice with partners and other local authorities both within the county and beyond in order to make use of resources
10. Part of the bill includes the creation of a Lead Local Flooding Authority. This puts the future responsibility for delivering land drainage and flood risk reduction throughout Oxfordshire on the County Council, and sets out a time table for some strategic actions that will be required of it. An immediate issue for the County Council to be determined is where its function as LLFA should sit and how it should be internally resourced. Again work in this area is being addressed by way of working with partners at the countywide strategic meeting to identify the impacts of the future changes and also to consider the additional resources required within the county council to undertake these additional responsibilities.
11. It cannot be underestimated that these changes are significant for the County Council and its partners and this is why planning has already started and will need to be increased in the coming months. With a great emphasis being placed by government on flood and water management activities there is a growing requirement for additional County Council resources to be made

available to cope with the measures and activities that need to be addressed both at an operational level and that required for partnership working as a result of the legislative responsibilities for lead authorities. This has already been acknowledged by a recent Transport Strategy meeting (a meeting of the two cabinet members for transport and senior officers) endorsing the recruitment of additional engineers to fulfil the expanded remit of the County Drainage Team. There will be real pressure on the County Council meet these new duties and responsibilities in a situation where the Government states that there is no new funding requirement arising from the proposals.

12. Additional funding has been put forward in the Cabinet's budget as seen by this committee when considering the budget proposals. As well as providing more staff resource this will enable more work to be done on Surface Water Management Plans and to carry out additional work on the ground.
13. **The Committee is invited to note the contents of this report and provide its views to the Cabinet Member for Growth & Infrastructure.**

STEVE HOWELL
Head of Transport
Environment & Economy

Background Papers: Nil

Contact Officer: Chris Brown Flood Group Coordinator

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