

To consider the following motion submitted by Councillors Caroline Jackson and Tim Hamilton-Cox.

“This council notes the response to recent flooding by city council officers was timely and effective. Issues arising from flooding in 2015 and earlier this year have been successfully used to create improved strategies to ensure the welfare and safety of residents. Communication and co-operation between services, agencies and voluntary and community groups was excellent. We wish to congratulate officers on this achievement.

This council also notes that the flooding in Galgate, Hala and Halton was partially caused by surface water run-off during heavy rainfall.

This council notes that this also applies to smaller areas of repeated flooding such as Caton Road, Lower Church Street, Long Marsh Lane, Willow Lane and Brook Street and these floods are causing stress, economic hardship and lost business.

There is evidence that flooding events linked to run off were exacerbated by blocked gullies many of which had been repeatedly notified to the county council over a long period.

We note also that the effective response to flooding has taken and will take many hours of officer time which means the other necessary work done to serve residents has been and will be delayed.

This council believes:

We now live in a city and district repeatedly subject to what is termed “unprecedented rainfall”. By definition more intense rainfall is now preceded and equally intense effort needs to be directed to mitigating the impact. We cannot accept the delays in gully clearing that have been noted by many elected members in this chamber and indeed elected members who sit at county level.

We have a duty to respond to hardship among district residents in an effective way.

This council resolves to:

1. *Hire a gully clearing vehicle for the 6 months January – June 2018 or sooner if possible and deploy it with appropriate staff members;*
 - a) *to clear all gullies already known to officers to create or add to known flood hazards.*
 - b) *to clear all gullies reported by members, businesses and residents known to create or add to known flood hazards.*
 - c) *to undertake a check of all gullies in sensitive areas of the district.*
2. *That the cost of this be taken in the first instance from the city council's general fund balance.*
3. *That steps be taken to recover costs as far as possible.*
4. *That urgent steps be taken by Cabinet and Lancaster City officers at the most senior level to recover the contract for gully cleaning from Lancashire County Council for financial year 2018-9 onwards.*

5. *That residents, councillors and officers work together to identify areas where street engineering is causing surface water run off to increase flood risk and by March 2018 prepare a report for County Highways on works needed.*
6. *That all interested parties Lancaster City council, United Utilities, Lancashire Lead Flood Authority and the Environment Agency are convened to consider urgently the problem of combined surface and foul water drains in flood prone areas and bring forward a plan to eliminate them as a risk to public health.”*

OFFICER BRIEFING NOTE

GENERAL POINTS

In the 24 hours from 09:00 GMT Wednesday 22nd Nov 2017 the station at Hazelrigg recorded 73.6mm of rain had fallen - the highest level in more than 50 years since the centre started weather observations.

The Council acknowledges the devastation that was caused to residents and businesses following this. Furthermore it acknowledges the lead role it has to play in helping our communities recover and then working with other parties to make improvements in the future.

How and where the impacts of any major rainfall event are manifested is complicated by many different factors. The different locations affected by the last rainfall event provide evidence of this.

Following any event of this nature the priority following the initial emergency is for residents, communities and businesses to get back to normal as soon as is possible.

What is also important is understanding fully what happened, why it happened and how the impact could be reduced in the future. This process involves analysis of the information held by the various agencies and accounts from those affected.

At this very early stage the focus of all agencies is still very much on recovery and gathering information on what happened.

An internal debriefing for the Council has taken place and a debriefing for all organisations involved (City Council, County Council, Environment Agency, Police, Fire Service, Voluntary organisations) is scheduled for January. For the City Council these debriefings will lead to recommendations being made that will help improve our response to future events.

As acknowledged in the motion following a similar debriefing process after Storm Desmond significant improvements in how the recovery operation took place have been made.

Three public meetings and a drop in event have taken place. These have allowed residents the opportunity to express their concerns to the relevant agencies and also provide information on the events of the night. Analysis of this information will allow agencies to understand what happened and establish what would be required to reduce the impacts in the future.

At this stage therefore Council would be advised to await the recommendations of the debriefing exercise.

GULLY EMPTYING

This motion highlights the maintenance of the surface water drainage system. Based on the information to date it is clear that there are many factors that need to be investigated before drawing any conclusions as to what caused flooding in different locations.

Gully maintenance is a function of the Highways Authority (Lancashire County Council).

From the gully cleaning and initial investigations that have been carried by the County Council since the event, it does not appear that blocked gullies were a significant contributory factor to the flooding. No underlying issues have been found and after the rain stopped and river levels dropped the water quickly drained from the highway.

Nevertheless the issue of gully cleaning is one that is understandably concerns residents.

As the responsible agency how they deliver this is for the County Council to decide. Up until April 2016 the work was 'sub-contracted' to the City Council. Work was undertaken to the schedule/ specification set by the County Council.

From April 2016 County Council took the decision to manage and deliver the function directly and therefore we have no continuing contractual arrangement with them. During the consultation process the City Council put forward reasons why we considered the model of City Council delivering was more effective (local knowledge, quick response etc). The County Council acknowledged this but took the view that on balance a rationalised service delivered from a base in the District (Caton) with staff who had been delivering the service transferring to them was the model that would provide best value for money.

Whilst all public sector organisations have their own defined responsibilities as far as the public are concerned their success and credibility is defined very much by how they cooperate and collaborate. Lancaster City Council very much recognises this.

From the meetings with flood affected residents the issues raised were about frequency and effectiveness rather than who delivers the gully emptying.

In this District joint working with the County Council on Public Realm initiatives already takes place successfully at strategic, tactical and operational levels. There are many good examples of this – Improvements to Lancaster City Centre/ Morecambe Town Centre, maintenance of roadside verges/ highway trees, car park improvements, cycle track network etc.

Building on this existing good relationship the Chief Officer would advise that the best way of progressing this issue is to seek to discuss this matter (at a Cabinet Member/ Chief Officer level) with the County Council and develop a plan that best meets the needs of our District. The local knowledge that Officers, Councillors and residents have could be fed into this process.

Already based on the information the County Council have gathered to date they are considering how best to schedule frequency of gully emptying in the areas affected by flooding.

An agreed approach could have other positive impacts. We already work jointly to improve the Public Realm in our District. Since the floods City Council and / County Council have been working in tandem on sweeping and gully emptying affected areas. Exploring how to extend this joined approach further to work in tandem throughout the year on sweeping / gully

maintenance would result in a more efficient and effective service. As an example we could also work with Parish councils / communities and devise a schedule that would allow notification of work in advance so residents move their cars.

The cost of the suggestion in the motion of a gully machine + team for 6 months is estimated at £80,000+ disposal costs. Council could pursue this option, (but would need to work with County to do so as they are County assets, and the ultimate responsibility would still rest with County) If Council wanted to pursue that option it would be better to contribute to County undertaking more gully emptying in the District.

However, for the reasons outlined, the Officer advice is to first of all understand the problem and then use our existing good relationship to pursue a collaborative approach that works for our District.

CONCLUSION

At this stage the Officer advice would be-

1. Consider the recommendations of the debrief once available
2. Cabinet member / Chief Officer meeting with County to request a collaborative approach to gully emptying / channel sweeping

Mark Davies – Chief Officer (Environment)

MONITORING OFFICER COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments

SECTION 151 OFFICER COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and she reiterates the Officer advice provided above, in light of the Council's duty to secure value for money and its challenging financial circumstances.