

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

19TH OCTOBER 2016

LANCASTER DISTRICT FLOOD RECOVERY UPDATE

AUTUMN 2016

Briefing Note by Chief Officer (Regeneration and Planning)

1. Introduction

1.1 The events which affected Lancaster District in December 2015 relating to Storm Desmond and to a much lesser extent Storm Eva were debated by Council on 2nd March 2016 and a report on the impacts including briefings from the emergency services, the Environment Agency and Electricity North West was considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20th April 2016. The Resilience Commission Task Group was set up following the Overview and Scrutiny meeting and is due to report at the end of this month.

1.2 Both Council and Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked that officers update them on what measures are being pursued to respond to the extreme storm events in order to try and prevent such an adverse impact on the district in the future. This briefing note will advise members of the current position in relation to the recovery process, and the work that is going on with other agencies to mitigate future events.

2. The recovery process

2.1 Eight months on from Storm Desmond the City Council is still operating under the formal recovery process. In particular it is still providing the Department for Communities and Local Government with regular updates on the number of households and businesses unable to return to their properties.

2.2 In addition it is still administering grant assistance applications for households and businesses for Property Resilience Grants. This means that the equivalent of two Regeneration and Planning Officers and 1.5 Health and Housing Officers remain working full time on these processes, along with regular support from staff in the Resources Service. At present it looks as though the Government expect to keep the current funding opportunities available until the end of the calendar year with all payments expected to be made by March 2017.

2.3 As of 5th September 2016 of the 225 households confirmed as flooded 58 are still unable to return to their homes. £154k of Community Support Grants have been paid to eligible households. Of the 212 businesses confirmed as flooded 23 are still not operational and a further 6 have permanently closed or moved out of the district. 24 businesses remain partially operational. £27K has been paid in business support grants.

2.4 Property Resilience Grants enable up to £5K of funds to be given to homes and businesses to add additional flood recovery measures to repairs to property to enable them to recover more quickly in the future if flooding occurs again. For households over £150K in resilience grants have been approved to date and for businesses take up has not been as high with only around £25K approved for applications at this time.

2.5 Through monies made available from the Government and administered by the Lancashire Community foundation to date at least 8 parishes have received almost £60K in funding towards the implementation of community based resilience projects. Significant interest is also now being shown in drafting community based emergency plans and the councils Civil Contingencies Officer is advising communities in this regard.

3. Flood mitigation measures

3.1 Lancashire County Council is the Lead Flood Authority and has been working with the Environment Agency to assess projects which need to be developed to respond to the major flooding incidents in the district. Overview and Scrutiny Committee heard that the flooding in Lancaster was caused by a complex set of circumstances centring around three causes.

- The inability of surface water to escape into the river
- Overflow from the river beyond Skerton Weir
- Flood waters escaping from the Millrace.

3.2 Improvements to Lancaster's flood defences have previously taken place under two earlier phases the latter of which was the completion of the new all alongside the Quayside at Luneside. The Environment Agency are now developing a 3rd phase to address the new issues which have arisen after Storm Desmond. These works expect to tap into an extra £350 million which has been allocated by the Government to address the need to improve flood defences.

3.3 Officers from the City Council will work alongside the County Council and Environment Agency to provide assistance in delivering these projects. At the most recent meeting on 19th August officers were advised that Phase 3 can be divided into two distinct projects. Investigating repairs and modifications to the Millrace, a project to be led by the County Council; and improved riverside defences along Caton Road which will be led by the Environment Agency.

3.4 The City Council will play an important role in these projects as its small team of engineers within the Regeneration and Planning Service could act as the project managers for such projects on behalf of the Environment Agency. In relation to the river defences much of the work will also take place on City Council owned land. There may also be a role for the City Council in assisting with the delivery of European funds for the project but this aspect is not quite clear at this stage.

3.5 City Council officers have also been made aware that Electricity North West is proposing to invest considerable sums (Circa £2m) in modifying the electricity substation at Caton Road to ensure that it can withstand a much greater threat from storm damage than it did last December.

3.6 At Warton where flooding from the River Keer affected homes on Gardener Road the Environment Agency has been repairing damage along the river course and has been undertaking dredging works. A number of discussions are taking place between land owners, local residents and the Environment Agency about potential new ways to manage the flood plain in this area to examine whether this might help with future flooding incidents.

3.7 At Slyne where flooding occurred during Storm Eva the County Council as Lead Flood Authority are considering the very complex and historic flooding land drainage issues which cause this flooding and what further steps if any can be taken to mitigate the collection of water from run off.

4.0 The Government's response

4.1 The Government issued a report on the impact of the two storms on 8th September 2016 and this describes the extent of the task ahead to properly prepare for future events of this kind. The Executive Summary for this report is appended to this briefing note. The report is comprehensive and covers a wide range of issues including improving resilience for key infrastructure such as electricity supply and mobile phone communications as well as long term measures to address the cause of flooding upstream. The range of responses now available through the use of new forms of temporary flood barriers is also covered. Officers have not had time to fully consider the report at the time of preparing this briefing note.

Chief Officer (Regeneration and Planning)

12th September 2016