

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD

REVIEW OF SERVICES TO PREVENT FLOODING TASK GROUP

FINAL REPORT

March 2021



Bromsgrove
District Council
www.bromsgrove.gov.uk

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MEMBERSHIP OF THE TASK GROUP



Councillor Rob Hunter



Councillor Andrew Beaumont



Councillor Steve Colella



Councillor Harrison Rone-Clark



Councillor Caroline Spencer

Supporting Officer Details

Jo Gresham – Democratic Services Officer
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Foreword from the Chairman

Flooding can cause severe damage to homes and possessions and disrupt communities. It can also pollute the environment and threaten ecosystems. In the worst cases it can cause injury and even loss of life. With the onset of climate change, flooding events are becoming more frequent, more severe and less predictable. The importance of good mitigation and flood alleviation work is now widely recognised. We must do whatever we can to reduce the risk of harm to our residents, businesses and the natural environment.

Bromsgrove District Council is not the Lead Local Flood Authority, but we do have some responsibility for flood alleviation work and a strong history of working successfully with our partner agencies to minimise the risks faced by local communities. This Task Group was established to see how we can build on this to tackle the increasingly severe threat that flooding now presents. I am pleased to report that we have taken a pragmatic approach, examining the roles and functions that BDC already has, to see where our flood alleviation work might be strengthened.

I am extremely grateful to Councillors Beaumont, Colella, Rone-Clarke and Spencer for their commitment to this important work over the last six months. I am delighted to have been able to work cross party to agree a number of practical and realistic proposals that will go a long way to improve flooding prevention in Bromsgrove. Our proposals cover a broad range of functions from Environmental Services to Planning and I believe they have real potential to make a positive difference to our communities.

Of course, we could not have done any this without the expert advice and guidance of colleagues at Bromsgrove District Council, alongside those from North Worcestershire Water Management, Worcestershire County Council and Severn Trent Water. On behalf of the task group, I would like to thank all our dedicated Bromsgrove officers and those from partner agencies for advising and facilitating our group. I'm really looking forward to seeing the proposals we developed together being put into action.

Councillor Rob Hunter
Chairman, Impact of Flooding in the District Task Group

Summary of Recommendations

Chapter 1 – Staffing

Recommendation 1
That consideration be given to the appoint two full-time specialist land drainage operatives for Bromsgrove and that a business case be undertaken.
Financial Implications for recommendations: There will be financial implications for regarding the appointment. The approximate costs would be £100k. This is subject to confirmation from any business case undertaken.
Legal Implications for recommendations: There are no direct legal implications in relation to this recommendation.
Resource Implications: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Increase in land drainage staff.2. Officer time to undertake the business case

Chapter 2 – Information and Communications

Recommendation 2
That a publicity campaign within the local community to raise the profile of North Worcestershire Water Management be carried out.
Financial Implications for recommendations: There would be no financial implications if the campaign were carried out online but if campaign materials such as posters or leaflets were to be used then there would be a small cost involved.
Legal Implications for recommendations: There are no direct legal implications in relation to this recommendation.
Resource Implications: Officer time

Recommendation 3

That the responsible authority(ies) publish a timetable of road sweeping and gully cleaning across the district.

Financial Implications:

There are no direct financial implications in relation to this recommendation.

Legal Implications:

There are no direct legal implications in relation to this recommendation.

Resource Implications:

Officer time.

Recommendation 4

That an annual item in respect of flooding be included in the Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme.

Financial Implications:

There are no direct financial implications in relation to this recommendation.

Legal Implications:

There are no direct legal implications in relation to this recommendation.

Resource Implications:

Officer time.

Chapter 3 – Local Plan**Recommendation 5**

- 1. RECOMMENDED that**
 - a) as part of the review of Bromsgrove’s local plan, adopt strict new planning policies requiring all new developments to consider the use of sustainable drainage facilities should be adopted; and**
 - b) this should include measures for watercourse enhancement and flood alleviation where necessary; and**

c) the Council will consider, subject to S106 funding, adopt land featuring watercourses and SuDS features on new developments.

Financial Implications:

There are no direct financial implications in relation to a) and b) of this recommendation. In respect of recommendation c) if adoption of all the sites were agreed there would be financial implications, although these would currently be difficult to predict.

Legal Implications:

There are no direct legal implications in relation to a) and b) of this recommendation. In respect of recommendation c) if adoption of all the sites were agreed there would be legal implications, although these would currently be difficult to predict.

Resource Implications:

Officer time.

Background Information

In February 2020, Councillor R. Hunter presented a topic proposal form containing proposed objectives for a Task Group entitled Review of Services to Prevent Flooding Task Group. Councillor Hunter highlighted the severe flooding that many areas of Bromsgrove had experienced during Autumn 2019 and the difficulty in ascertaining who was responsible for remedying flooding events due to the number of agencies involved and their areas of responsibilities.

The key objectives of the proposed Task Group were as follows:

- Review key incidents of flooding in the district, their causes and the effectiveness of responses.
- Assess whether sufficient work is being undertaken to reduce the risk of flooding
- Assess whether sufficient resources are made available for this work
- Assess whether there is sufficient transparency over responsibilities for managing and reducing the risk of flooding

Following consideration of the topic proposal at its meeting on Monday 10th February 2020, the Overview and Scrutiny Board agreed that a Task Group should be set up and appointed Councillor R. Hunter as its Chairman and requested that the Group report back with its findings within 12 months.

Due to the impact of Covid-19 there had been a delay in confirmation of the Members of the Task Group. However, at the June 2020 meeting of the Board, the Terms of Reference of the Task Group were confirmed. It was agreed that the work of the Task Group would begin as soon as possible. Councillor Hunter requested that Members be contacted again to see if there was any further interest in joining the Task Group.

Following its initial meeting on 16th July 2020, the Task Group agreed the work programme for the Task Group and key witnesses they would like to interview.

The Group has held 6 meetings in total since that date and carried out interviews with a number of key witnesses. The interviews were focussed on the following questions and the Task Group's recommendations reflect the areas that the Task Group investigated in detail:

1. What kind of work does the agency carry out with residents to mitigate flooding issues?
2. How do all the agencies work together?
3. What monitoring and flood alleviation projects are currently being undertaken?

4. Are there any additional measures that this authority in partnership with the other agencies could be taking to reduce the risk of flooding in the key hot spots?
5. Are any more resources required?

Chapter 1 – Staffing

During the investigation, one of the main areas Members were interested in was understanding more fully the regularity of works undertaken by officers from all of the agencies involved. During their interview with Senior Water Management Officers from North Worcestershire Water Management (NWWM) it was reported that the Place Team from Environmental Services at Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) carried out minor maintenance of grids in advance of heavy rain, and watercourse maintenance when required. NWWM reported that the Place Team did a very good job of carrying out these works, however the approach was more reactive than proactive due to the limited resources.

When interviewing the Environmental Services Manager from BDC, Members were informed that currently Worcestershire County Council (WCC) worked to a schedule of clearing road drains using high level data gathered by GPS monitoring for each ward, with areas more prone to flooding and debris being visited for clearance more often. It was clarified to the Task Group that sometimes the schedule was not able to be carried out as planned due to inclement weather or needs in other areas of the District. Indeed, it was noted that WCC previously had a schedule of works for the Wythall area in respect of road gully clearance. It was noted that these works had decreased over time in order to deal with needs in other known sites in the District. Members were informed that the cycle of works could be every 18 months and it was felt by the Task Group that this length of time was not satisfactory particularly as the cleaning of gullies and watercourses could reduce the risk of future flooding events.

As a result of the information received from both Environmental Services Manager at BDC and the Senior Water Management Officer from NWWM the Task Group agreed that there seemed to be issues with the regularity of maintenance works and that this might be linked to staffing levels.

Currently there are no land drainage operatives that operate for Bromsgrove District Council. Work undertaken regarding the maintenance of water courses and culverts is currently carried out by the Place Team or Parks and Leisure Team in Bromsgrove. This does not occur as a part of a schedule of works but when there is capacity or if a need is identified. The group initially discussed the option to hire one drainage operative. However, it was clarified by the Environmental Services Manager that teams had to undertake work with water in pairs (at least) for Health and Safety reasons and that a team of two BDC operatives would be needed to monitor the water courses and culverts in the Bromsgrove region to provide proactive maintenance. Members agreed that a team would be beneficial and would go towards reducing the costs involved in restoring homes, businesses, and highways after a flooding event.

The employment of two officers to join the team would enable regular maintenance of the 12.6km of Bromsgrove watercourses that were owned or maintained by BDC or that lacked maintenance due to unclear ownership. This would replace the current ad hoc approach which did not always provide enough resources to reduce the risk of serious flooding incidents from occurring. The Task Group agreed that where necessary, if flood alleviation work was undertaken on watercourses not owned by BDC a recharge policy would be pursued, bringing in additional revenue to the Council to help mitigate any costs from increased staffing levels.

A comparison to the cost of the Redditch Borough Council team was made and an estimate of approximately £100,000 was given, this included salaries, vehicles, maintenance and equipment for the drainage operatives. Officers advised that a business case would detail the exact costs and would be more appropriate given the costs involved.

The Task Group therefore recommends the following:

Recommendation 1
That consideration be given to appoint two full-time specialist land drainage officers for Bromsgrove and that a business case be undertaken.

Chapter 2 – Information and Communications

During the interview with the Environmental Services Manager, it was clear that many agencies were involved in dealing with flooding in the District, including Worcestershire County Council (WCC) as Lead Local Flood and Highway Authority, NWWM, Severn Trent Water and the Environment Agency. In some areas it was reported that there were overlaps which caused complexity and roles were sometimes not as clearly defined as they might have been. This was confirmed at other interviews throughout the investigation and Members discovered that although the agencies involved knew their responsibilities it was not always so clear to members of the public when reporting a flooding event.

In addition to the clarity of roles there was evidence provided during the investigation that communication and engagement with local communities was a powerful tool in the prevention of flooding in the District. Evidence was presented by NWWM that closer working with local landowners had helped when enforcement was needed in cases of blocked culverts and ditches on their land which might result in a flood.

Severn Trent Water also suggested that Members should encourage residents to report flooding issues when experienced, as more notifications that were received resulted in greater leverage for agencies to investigate and reduce the risk of flooding and for future potential sources of funding. In addition to this, it was reported during the interview with Severn Trent Water that the majority of residential flooding issues were caused by wastewater misuse such as incorrect disposal of wet wipes, nappies and food waste and any communication by Members in respect of correct disposal of waste would be appreciated. Members thought this was useful information and that there needed to be heightened awareness within communities of the problems of water misuse. It was agreed that this was an area where Members could certainly provide assistance.

In respect of reporting a flood on the highway, the Task Group were informed by WCC officers that flood events could be reported through the portal on the WCC website. Signposts were also detailed on the portal for residents to report all types of flooding events including those on a main river, watercourse, surface water and sewer flooding. In fact, all agencies had mechanisms to report an incident and Members acknowledged that this was useful but agreed that residents who did not have a clear picture of the structure of flood management agencies would not necessarily always report to the most appropriate agency.

During the investigation Members were also keen to understand the schedule of works carried out regularly by agencies so that when residents contacted them regarding a flooding issue, they were able to refer them to information of when works were last carried out and when they would be carried out in the future.

Although both BDC and WCC confirmed that works were cyclic and planned, there were times when there needed to be amendments to respond to unexpected events or adverse weather conditions which meant that the work could not be carried out as planned. Members felt that this was an area that needed to be addressed for the future.

Across all of the interviews that were carried out by the Task Group there was evidence that greater engagement with local communities and communication helped when dealing with flooding issues in local communities. It was also suggested that greater engagement resulted in more reporting of flooding, better relationships between communities and agencies which resulted in a more proactive approach from both parties.

Members were keen to have an online campaign that promoted the work of NWWM and highlighted the roles of Flood Management agencies. It was noted that previously campaigns such as these had been carried out on the Council's social media platforms and websites and that these might be an appropriate way to communicate with a larger number of residents. In addition to this, press releases and the provision of information to Members in order for them to distribute to their networks would also be an appropriate way of communicating to local communities.

During the discussion of potential recommendations, it was suggested that it might be useful for an annual report in respect of flooding to be prepared for 2021 and annually thereafter and provided to Members. It was queried what the purpose would be for this presentation of this report as it could potentially take up a lot of officer resource and might only be used to gather information that could be accessed in an alternative way. There was particular interest from some Members regarding flood plains and any reported changes to them. It was confirmed that the information regarding flood plains was the responsibility of The Environment Agency and that they were not updated annually as it was an expensive and detailed project and so it would not be possible to include this information as part of an annual report. It was agreed that the most effective way to monitor any flooding work being undertaken by the Council was the addition of an annual Flooding item to the Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme.

The Task Group therefore recommends the following:

Recommendation 2
Run a publicity campaign within the local community to raise the profile of North Worcestershire Water Management, the work it does and how the public can get in contact with the various flood risk management authorities if they are concerned about flooding or drainage issues

Recommendation 3

That the responsible authority(ies) publish a timetable of road sweeping and gully cleaning across the district.

Recommendation 4

That an annual item in respect of flooding be included in the Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme.

Chapter 3 – Local Plan

The Task Group discussed the importance of measures that were currently taken by BDC regarding Flood Management. All agencies that were interviewed by the Task Group provided information and evidence that Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) were part of future flood risk management planning and, as the Council was responsible for contributing to their implementation, this was considered by Members as an important topic to look at as part of their investigation and that Water Management was a significant area for the Council going forward.

NWWM provided evidence during their interview with the Task Group that SuDS were designed to drain an area in a more sustainable fashion compared to some more conventional techniques. In addition to this, it was reported to Members that, SuDS aimed to improve water quality, biodiversity and the amenity of an area while managing the quantity of water. WCC had also provided evidence that one of its future challenges was the exploration of options for the future maintenance of SuDS.

The Task Group were provided with a copy of the current Local Plan and discussed in detail the inclusion of SuDS within it. Members acknowledged that SuDS were already included in the Local Plan as part of the Water Management policy. However, it was noted that currently a review of the Local Plan was underway, and the Task Group members were keen to ensure the inclusion and consideration of SuDS in any future iterations of the Local Plan, particularly as they were considered such an important area for future local developments. Members also agreed that this would ensure that Planning Officers could be supported to enforce sustainable and appropriate new developments. Members were all in agreement with this. It was agreed that clarification was required on whether SuDS features are being considered for all developments. The Chairman added that the recommendation would clarify the existing plans.

The Task Group therefore recommends the following:

Recommendation 5
<p>RECOMMENDED that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) as part of the review of Bromsgrove's Local Plan, adopt strict new planning policies requiring all new developments to consider the use of sustainable drainage facilities should be adopted; andb) this should include measures for watercourse enhancement and flood alleviation where necessary; andc) the Council will consider, subject to S106 funding, adopt land featuring watercourses and SuDS features on new developments.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD –Review of Services to Prevent Flooding Task Group

Terms of Reference as at July 2020

The Review of Services to Prevent Flooding Task Group has been set up by the Overview & Scrutiny Board to carry out detailed scrutiny/pre-scrutiny of the Review of Services to Prevent Flooding in the District.

1. The Task Group will be made up of 5 Members with a quorum of 3. The Task Group will meet throughout the next six months (with a caveat to extend, if necessary) at intervals to be decided by the Group.
2. The Task Group will be a standing item on the agenda of the Overview & Scrutiny Board and either a verbal or written report will be provided at each of the Board's meetings.
3. The Task Group is able to make recommendations to the Overview & Scrutiny Board who will then put forward its recommendations for consideration by Cabinet or directly to Cabinet/Council.
4. The Task group is expected to complete the investigation in six months (with a caveat to extend, if necessary) and provide its findings and recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Board in a written report at that time.

Aims and Objectives of the Task Group

Scrutiny of the Review of Services to Prevent Flooding Task Group will cover the following areas, although this list is not exclusive:

- Review key incidents of flooding in the district, their causes and the effectiveness of responses.
- Assess whether sufficient work is being undertaken to prevent flooding
- Assess whether sufficient resources are made available for this work
- Assess whether there is sufficient transparency over responsibilities for managing and preventing flooding.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY TOPIC PROPOSAL

This form can be used for either a Task Group or a Short Sharp Review topic proposal.

Completed forms should be returned to scrutiny@bromsgrove.gov.uk – Democratic Services, Bromsgrove District Council.

Name of Proposer: Rob Hunter
Email: r.hunter@bromsgrove.gov.uk
Date: 16/01/2020

Title of Proposed Topic (including specific subject areas to be investigate)	Review of services to prevent flooding
Background to the Proposal (Including reasons why this topic should be investigated and evidence to support the need for the investigation.)	Many areas across Bromsgrove experienced severe flooding during Autumn 2019. Anecdotally there is evidence to suggest the problems were exacerbated by a lack of prevention work such as keeping brooks, drains and culverts clear. Furthermore, as flood prevention transcends the remit of a number of authorities it can be difficult to establish which agency is responsible for remedying problems.
Links to national, regional and local priorities (including the Council's strategic purposes)	Bromsgrove District Council Plan strategic purpose: 'Communities which are safe, well-maintained and green'
Possible Key Objectives (these should be SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review key incidents of flooding in the district, their causes and the effectiveness of responses - Assess whether sufficient work is being undertaken to prevent flooding - Assess whether sufficient resources are made available for this work - Assess whether there is sufficient transparency over responsibilities for managing and preventing flooding
Anticipated Timescale for completion of the work.	One year
Would it be appropriate to hold a Short Sharp Inquiry or a Task Group? (please tick relevant box)	Task Group

Background Papers

External Documents

Bromsgrove Flood Risk Management Plan – Worcestershire County Council

Internal Documents

Bromsgrove District Plan – 2011 - 2030 (adopted January 2017)

Witnesses

The Task Group considered evidence from the following sources before making its recommendations:

Internal Witnesses:

Kevin Hirons – Environmental Services Manager, Bromsgrove District Council
Councillor Margaret Sherrey – Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services,
Bromsgrove District Council

External Witnesses

Fiona McIntosh, Senior Water Management Officer - North Worcestershire Water Management
Kristen Huizer, Senior Water Management Officer – North Worcestershire Water Management

Michael Green, Senior Flood Risk Consultant – Worcestershire County Council
Glen Lucitt - Worcestershire County Council

Tim Smith, Flooding and Partnerships Manager – Severn Trent Water
Jacqui Whitehead, Waste Network Asset Planning, Chief Engineer – Severn Trent Water
Mathew Jeynes, Waste Networks Operations Manager for Worcestershire - Severn Trent Water
Brandon Smith, Waste Catchment Lead - Severn Trent Water

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