

Member Update on emerging issues and developments within the remit of each Overview and Scrutiny Panel and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee - September 2020

Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel – 9 September 2020 – Councillor Adam Kent

1. Freedom of Information and Subject Access Reports were investigated.
 - a. The Panel was surprised by the scale of these and the number of requests and time needed to respond.
 - b. Several progressive ideas were put forward in terms of a Knowledge base (in case asked before)
 - c. Logging and reporting of time taken to respond to requests were discussed.
 - d. Include FOI/SAR in Quarterly Reports going forward

2. The County Council's Commissioning Arrangements – discussions focussed on:
 - a. Time frames and investigation of contracts affected by COVID-19.
 - b. Clarifying the position on contracts and expiry dates

Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel – 11 September 2020 – Councillor Alastair Adams

The main Agenda Item was 'Flood Risk Management Annual Report/Update on Flooding 2019-20'. Representatives from Worcestershire County Council (the Council), Severn Trent (ST) and the Environment Agency (EA) attended. The main points were:

1. Everyone recognised that Worcestershire suffered serious floods between October 2019 and March 2020. In October/November 2019 over 70 residential properties were flooded. In February/March 2020, circa 700 residential properties and over 200 businesses were impacted by flooding. All partners seemed to respond very effectively during these emergencies, and the Panel complimented all those involved.
2. Questions were raised on what learning points were made and what would be done differently in future. For example, the temporary flood barriers in Bewdley did over-top and there was a risk that they could have failed. Were new barriers to be designed for next time? The EA suggested that the barriers were already at the highest height for a temporary barrier, but other ideas were being explored.

3. **The key question raised by the Panel was the lack of information and the perceived lack of progress in the delivery of flood alleviation schemes.** Residents that have been affected by flooding want to know what is going to be done to prevent flooding in the future and when these schemes will be delivered. More information on the schemes listed on para 3.1 of the report will be provided. Paul Smith, the Assistant Director for Highways and Transport Operations, agreed that Members would receive regular detailed updates on flood alleviation projects with time frames. Councillor Kent requested Gantt charts should be provided for each project showing the various stages and the time frames.
4. It was reported that putting together a case for a flood alleviation scheme to obtain the grants was an onerous one and very time consuming and lengthy process. **The Panel asked the question “How can we speed this up?”** (The EA gave an example of the flood alleviation project at Tenbury which had just received a £4.9m grant and the EA was hoping to commence work in Q4 2021/22. Each project takes 4-5 years).
5. The point was made by Officers that the multi-agency approach taken in recent years does help produce better outcomes over time – for example when looking at river flooding, the whole stretch of the River Severn can be looked at holistically.
6. Following a question about paying farmers to allow some of their land to flood upstream of settlements to help prevent flooding, it was reported that there are current schemes but they are very complicated to apply for.
7. ST and EA agreed to provide their 24/7 contact details so Members can contact them in future flood situations. A specific sewage pumping station that failed in the flooding was discussed in Councillor Kent’s area and they agreed to investigate and report back.
8. The link to the Surface Water Management Plan on the Worcestershire County Council website would be circulated to all Councillors as it identifies 1,700 known flood spots. This will show each Councillor in each Division where surface water flooding is most likely to occur in their area. Local knowledge can feed back in to help fine tune the plans. The comment was made that all agencies were learning from each new flooding event and more modern techniques were being used such as using drones in flooding situations to map the extent of flooding. However, local knowledge is invaluable.
9. A question was raised for further help /training for District Councillors assessing planning applications where flooding is an issue.
10. ST agreed to give more information of the schemes they have delivered in the last 12-24 months, and the ones in the pipeline. It was confirmed they are developing their water and sewerage network to cope with future housing developments. It was also stated that OfWat approved in April 2020 that the water companies can work with developers to adopt and maintain Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) moving forward.