

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**8 OCTOBER 2014**

**REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND SHARED SERVICES**

**Report prepared by David Edwards**

**FLOODING EVENTS IN MAIDSTONE**

1.1 Issue for Decision

- 1.1.1 To consider the issues that borough residents, visitors, businesses and the Council faced during the flooding emergency phase between December 2013 and February 2014;
- 1.1.2 To consider the Council response to the flooding and the further work that has been undertaken during the recovery phase; and
- 1.1.3 To consider the lessons learnt and recommendations in relation to emergency planning arrangements in the borough.

1.2 Recommendation of the Director of Environment and Shared Services

- 1.2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet notes the actions and progress:
  - on the emergency planning arrangements contained in Appendix A;
  - of the work facilitated through a range of organisations including the parish councils, the National Flood Forum and Environment Agency.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

- 1.3.1 Between the 24 December 2013 and 17 February 2014, significant flooding occurred in several parts of the borough. This report focuses on the lead up to the events, the key issues that arose during the emergency phases and the steps that have been taken subsequently as part of the recovery phase. This includes identifying some of the key areas where arrangements worked well, as well as those where there are lessons to be learnt and recommendations for the future.

- 1.3.2 The Council is a Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act with a duty to ensure both our services are maintained and to plan for emergencies so that humanitarian and environmental effects can be mitigated.
- 1.3.3 Our activities around emergency planning are continuous and extensive as a district and as part of the police chaired Kent Resilience Forum (KRF). This is a partnership of all the organisations that have a role to play in the response to a major emergency in the county such as the County Council, all districts, blue light services, the Environment Agency and the voluntary sector.
- 1.3.4 Like most districts Maidstone has adopted the "One Kent" approach to emergency planning, training and exercising. This along with the formal structure of the KRF and its various working groups ensures all partners work together towards a true multi agency response.
- 1.3.5 The One Kent approach clearly defines roles and responsibilities. For example the Environment Agency warn of floods, the Police warn and inform the public, the fire service executes rescues. Kent County Council arranges transport and the local authorities provide humanitarian assistance with the voluntary sector to displaced persons by running rest centres and providing temporary accommodation for homeless persons.
- 1.3.6 Although this report considers the response of the Council, it can be seen that very often that response requires an integrated approach and joint working by all agencies.
- 1.3.7 In order to be effective, the One Kent approach needs to extend down to community plans and KCC have a senior planning officer tasked with liaising with parish councils. To date plans are in place or in progress for Boughton Monchelsea, Boughton Malherbe, Collier Street, Staplehurst, Tovil, Lenham and Yalding.
- 1.3.8 Over 300 residential and 60 business properties flooded at Christmas and at the start of the year resulting in several hundred people being placed in temporary accommodation. The following report identifies some of the key issues across the borough and for the Council. Although many communities were affected, it is not the intention in this report to cover in detail all the areas that were flooded.
- 1.3.9 This report is being presented at this stage as it was felt to be a timely moment to reflect on the work that has taken place and report to Cabinet before we enter into the autumn period.

#### 1.4 Background

- 1.4.1 The emergency situation that occurred during the Christmas period in 2013 had been preceded by very high winds which had caused the loss of power in many parts of the borough. This severe weather was identified by the Met Office from Friday 20 December and a yellow warning was issued for high winds. There was no expectation of property flooding at this stage although higher levels of rainfall were predicted for the Monday and Tuesday.
- 1.4.2 On Saturday 21 December the Environment Agency put flood alerts ("flooding is a possibility, be prepared") on the Lower River Medway and the River Beult.
- 1.4.3 On Sunday 22 December, there were no changes to the flood alerts, although it was noted at a Severe Weather Advisory Group (which is chaired by the County Council) that day that Flood Warnings were likely to be seen from Monday into Tuesday.
- 1.4.4 On Monday 23 December, Flood Alerts were issued at midday for the River Teise and Lesser Teise between Horsmonden and Yalding and for the Middle River Medway. Later that afternoon, a Flood Warning ("flooding is expected, immediate action is required") was issued for the River Beult from Pluckley and Bethersden to Hampstead Lock and in the early evening a Flood Warning for the River Teise and Lesser Teise between Horsmonden and Yalding was issued. This was not an unusual situation at this stage as there have been similar warnings issued along these rivers on several occasions since the floods in 2000.

#### 1.5 Emergency Phase

- 1.5.1 On Tuesday 24 December just after 6am, a Flood Warning was issued for the River Medway between Tonbridge and Hampstead Lock and reports of power outages were starting to feed through. The Emergency Planning Manager opened the Emergency Centre at Maidstone House to facilitate the response and by 1030 had alerted senior officers and staff of a possible escalation in our response level later in the day.
- 1.5.2 A visit was made to Yalding by the Emergency Planning Manager at 1130 who observed the Lees was already flooded. The weather situation was calm, residents in Yalding were out and about and UK Power Networks were in the Village working on restoring power.
- 1.5.3 The Met Office report stated that "the worst of the weather is now over from last night's storms. Today will be a day of sunshine and showers. Some of the showers could be heavy. Showers will continue

during the night, especially in southern counties, becoming more widespread again tomorrow. Boxing day looks like being the best day of the week with sunny spells and only isolated showers”.

- 1.5.4 The Emergency Planning Manager liaised with KCC and decided the situation still warranted a Level 2 response under the Council’s Activation Plan. A level 2 response will involve activity from a range of staff within MBC directorates and teams, and usually engagement of senior managers managing individual activities. Full opening of the Borough Emergency Centre was not required but this was to be used to facilitate the response. Based on what he had seen at Yalding, the Emergency Planning Manager began preparation to open a rest centre in case the flood waters rose.
- 1.5.5 That afternoon the situation escalated. A Council rest centre was opened as Kent Fire and Rescue Services evacuated people from Little Venice. Initial information was that the evacuation would involve one or more coach loads of residents however most made their own evacuation arrangements and a total six people arrived at the rest centre. Once they had been fed and found temporary accommodation, the rest centre was closed at about 2230.
- 1.5.6 After closing the Council rest centre, and based on the Met Office information at the time, it was felt that the worst of the floods had been dealt with. This was supported by the overnight coordinator who reported no calls through to 6am on Christmas Day.
- 1.5.7 However, the worst was not over and the incident escalated again through Christmas Day with significant flooding in Yalding and in Maidstone Town Centre as well as several other villages.
- 1.5.8 In response, the quality of strategic and tactical decisions made by coordinators is entirely reliant on quality information being received through our multi agency partners. During this incident there were occasions when information on flood areas and peak levels was conflicting or inaccurate resulting in a less than satisfactory response. This can cause reputational implications as residents see the Council as the main responder. These matters have been discussed at length with a range of organisations including the Environment Agency and measures have been taken by them to improve the warnings and information before the end of 2014.
- 1.5.9 Coordinators’ decisions were mostly based on information received from the Met Office and the Environment Agency and in particular the levels of Flood Warnings. A Severe Flood Warning (severe flooding, danger to life) triggers a considerably greater and more urgent response from all agencies but was not issued during these floods because not all of the catchment area was affected to that level.

- 1.5.10 A Severe Flood Warning for Yalding would have covered the entire warning area at the time which extends from the south of the borough through to Allington Lock. In the discussions that took place between the lead agencies, it was viewed that this would have caused unnecessary alarm to residents not affected and required significant additional resources from all agencies to cope with the resulting warning, informing and evacuation.
- 1.5.11 Had the Environment Agency risk assessment been based only on Little Venice and Yalding, it is probable that a Severe Warning would have been issued and our response would have been different. This issue is due to be resolved in the autumn and the extensive warning area is to be split into several areas with Yalding and Little Venice having their own separate warning areas.
- 1.5.12 The Emergency Centre in room 6D of Maidstone House was opened and available 24/7 from 22<sup>nd</sup> December onwards and was the main base for coordinating our response. At all times day and night, either the centre was staffed or an "on call" Rota was operated for all roles.
- 1.5.13 The initial Emergency situation over Christmas moved into the recovery phase on 27<sup>th</sup> December 2013. However, given the further rainfall and flooding in the borough over the New Year and in January the Council continued with the incident response until 17<sup>th</sup> February 2014. These continued phases of rain and flood affected further communities through a combination of fluvial, ground water and surface water flooding.
- 1.5.14 The main response from the Council in this emergency situation was a humanitarian one. In addition to running our own response, our multi-agency response provided representation at strategic, tactical and operational groups, work through the media groups as well as reporting up to the Department for Communities and Local Government-Resilience and Emergencies Division (DCLG RED) and Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBR).
- 1.5.15 The further flooding incidents into February are not covered in any detail in this report as it is felt that the key themes that emerged did so during the first flooding. This should not detract from recognising the problems that were caused across the borough for several weeks which did put pressure on resources as well as affecting over 300 householders. Several lessons were learnt and implemented in subsequent episodes including the impact of rainfall and weather forecasts, public information and warnings through to notice of visits by leading public figures to the borough.

- 1.5.16 Although not directly linked to the Council operation, there was also significant controversy at the time over the operation of the Leigh Barrier. Since the flooding, the Environment Agency has undertaken a range of presentations and made their data and an independent auditors report available, including on the Yalding Parish Council website. The operation of the barrier reduced the flow on the Beult and Lower Medway from around 350m<sup>3</sup>/second to 165m<sup>3</sup> over Christmas and therefore significantly reducing the impact of the rainfall. To put this in perspective, the higher figure would have filled an Olympic sized swimming pool in seven seconds. Visits have also been arranged by the Environment Agency to explain how the barrier operates.
- 1.5.17 Since the flooding, two major capital schemes have been proposed by the Environment Agency to mitigate the effects of a similar event in the future. The first and most likely to come to fruition is to increase the capacity of the Leigh storage area. The second is the creation of a new catchment/storage area for the River Beult to protect Yalding.
- 1.5.18 Both schemes require significant funding from Government, the Environment Agency and Kent County Council as well as extensive investigation and consultation and so are unlikely to be in place for some time. With regards the Beult storage area, this needs to be modelled to ensure it does not simply move the problem and affect communities elsewhere.
- 1.5.19 The Government also has a fund to support councils in emergency situations and the Council put a bid into the Government's Bellwin Scheme (this enables authorities to claim back some of the emergency related expenditure above a certain threshold). In June 2014, a submission was made for £130,000 and this has subsequently been approved.

## 1.6 Role of Councillors

- 1.6.1 A member of Cabinet took the political lead role for the recovery phase of the incident attending the continuing internal meetings as well as residents meetings in Yalding, Little Venice and Collier Street.
- 1.6.2 The Leader of the Council, Cabinet and Borough Councillors, particularly those with affected wards were briefed at regular intervals by officers and throughout the response.
- 1.6.3 The role of Councillors during a response is key and mainly one of community liaison and communication. As community leaders, Councillors are well placed to reassure people, answer questions from residents or pass their questions onto an appropriate officer or agency.

1.6.4 Although community liaison was also provided by Council officers as well as the Environment Agency and County Council, some communities and individuals still felt that they were isolated and ignored.

## 1.7 Recovery

1.7.1 The following section looks at activities and actions taken during the Recovery Phase of the incident. The objective of the Recovery Phase is to use the KRF framework to facilitate and assist residents and businesses to rebuild their communities themselves offering whatever assistance and advice we can.

1.7.2 Recovery can take years to complete depending on the incident and this is likely to remain a work stream for the Council for several months to come.

1.7.3 The Cabinet Member for the Environment and Housing was identified to lead on the work. A council officer group was also established which then fed into the wider Countywide Recovery Group. The various workstreams were as follows:-

- Health, Welfare and Communities;
- Environment and Infrastructure;
- Business and the Economy;
- Finance and Insurance; and
- Media and Communications.

1.7.4 For each of the groups, a lead Council officer was identified who then reported and tracked progress and fed into the county-wide groups that had been established. Overall it is felt that this arrangement has worked well. Activities have included assisting residents with the clean up by taking flood damaged goods away, cleaning surfaces, advising on claims, establishing local schemes to administer Government funding, supporting people who were made homeless, capturing details on expenditure, keeping the public informed and responding to enquiries.

1.7.5 In addition, the Council funded a resilience work stream through the National Flood Forum (NFF), a national charity that raises the awareness of flood risks, helps people and communities to protect themselves and supports those who have endured the misery of flooding. The NFF was tasked with working with partners to understand and communicate with communities affected by the flooding in Maidstone so that they become more resilient to floods and understand existing roles and responsibilities of agencies and communities.

- 1.7.6 The NFF engaged affected communities in conversation by way of a staffed trailer at relevant locations. The trailer offered a “neutral” venue for people to gain understanding and assistance on all issues connected to being flooded. The trailer was staffed by the NFF and invited attendance from partners, including the Borough Council, Environment Agency and KCC Community Wardens.
- 1.7.7 The NFF carried out detailed interviews with over 80 households (with several having repeat visits) as well as providing advice and information to the public, ward and parish councillors.
- 1.7.8 Due to the prolonged and nationally extensive nature of the flooding and the need to secure funding, the NFF commenced working in the borough in April. The demands placed on the organisation were significant and it was only possible to secure their support because of the early contact made with them in January. Although the delay in commencing work may have lost some opportunities to engage early with the public that were affected over the Christmas period, it did allow the discussions to include the national support schemes available and develop a better understanding to improve the application process for residents.
- 1.7.9 Some of the key issues raised by the public included insurance claims, obtaining insurance in the future, selecting possible contractors, preventative measures that could be taken in the future and the delay and content of the flood warnings.
- 1.7.10 Feedback from the NFF suggests that the programme could have been more flexible and adapted after the initial road shows. The initial aim had been to cover all areas of the borough where significant flooding had taken place and provide the opportunity to follow up in each location. By revising the programme part way through, greater resources could have been deployed to the areas where there was the most public interest, but this may have been at the cost of responding in all the flooded areas.
- 1.7.11 The NFF trailer events provided positive community feedback regarding Kent Fire and Rescue Service, Kent Police, Parish Councils and Maidstone Borough Council and gauged a healthy interest in setting up future Flood Action Groups, supported by the NFF and working in partnership to reduce flood risk and become resilient. There was an appreciation of the NFF trailer giving an opportunity to talk, gain support and advice. Listening and empathy played an essential role in recovery.
- 1.7.12 However, feedback also showed that the main community concerns included the initial emergency flood warnings and response time, help

and support for the vulnerable during the flooding, capacity of drains, sewage and maintenance, future insurance availability and property reinstatement and the Repair & Renew Grant process. Most of these are not within the powers of the Council to control however the information will be shared with partners for them to develop as actions.

- 1.7.13 In light of this feedback, the NFF supported a Flood Exhibition in partnership with the Borough Council and the Environment Agency in June this year. The event, held in Yalding was well received and provided the opportunity for residents to discuss the Repair and Renew Grant and gain an understanding of property flood products available. Based on the event's success, the NFF and partners have proposed a further event in Yalding in October.
- 1.7.14 The NFF reported the need for residents receiving improved support and household advice in preparation for flooding. It was suggested that timely information could be made available when people were being accommodated in rest centres or hotels after being evacuated and the Council will include this in future arrangements. On a related point some discussion has already taken place with the Kent Resilience Forum, Environment Agency and other agencies in Kent to look at the household information that is currently available, with a new booklet designed to cover all emergencies to be available in the autumn. In terms of the rest centres, it was also suggested that more could be done to engage agencies such as the Red Cross, which could provide additional support resources. However, in the main people were accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation, if in the future a rest centre arrangement was put in place for some period it is recognised that the Red Cross would be contacted for support.
- 1.7.15 The Government also announced several financial schemes to support the recovery programme. This included business support (where there was significant local flexibility in administration) the repair and renewal grants (which were more prescriptive initially) and council tax and business rate relief. The table below summarises the position at the end of August for Maidstone.

Number of residential properties flooded		
	- where people have returned to their home	290
	- where people have been unable to return to their home <sup>1</sup>	10
Number of business properties flooded		
	- which are fully operational	59
	- which are still not operational	2

Council Tax		
	- number of properties currently receiving discount	121
	- value of discount currently awarded	£53,334
	- estimated number of properties to be awarded discount	300
	- estimated value of discount to be awarded	£132,233

Business Rates		
	- number of properties currently receiving flood relief	43
	- value of flood relief currently awarded	£178,694
	- estimated number of properties to be awarded flood relief	45
	- estimated value of flood relief to be awarded	£188,288

Business Support Scheme <sub>6</sub>		
	- total number of live applications	0
	- total number of grants awarded to directly affected businesses	29
	- value of grants awarded to directly affected businesses	£195,646
	- total number of grants awarded to indirectly affected businesses	4
	- value of grants awarded to indirectly affected businesses	£19,179

Repair and Renew Grant <sub>7</sub>		
	- total number of applications accepted	51
	- total number of applications rejected	0
	- total number of applications approved	50
	- value of grants paid out	£16,475

1.7.16 One of the key factors has been the lower number of repair and renew grant applications compared to the number of properties that flooded. The National Flood Forum and the Department for Communities and Local Government have also confirmed that this has been a national trend. The original deadline for submitting claims was 30 September, and claimants have until 31 Jan 2015 to complete works and submit evidence for payment. The deadline for the Council to submit invoices to DEFRA for claims paid is March 2015.

1.7.17 A number of the claims the Council has received so far are for surveys and the Council is expecting to receive additional claims for works in respect of these. The first deadline (to allow these individuals time to obtain quotes and submit a claim for works) has recently been extended by the Council until the 31 October, however, the final deadline cannot be extended.

- 1.7.18 The Council has actively promoted this scheme and has been supported by parish councils and other community groups. Through the proactive approach of the parishes and Yalding Parish Council in particular the number of repair and renewal claims has increased significantly but the work has to be completed and paid for by early 2015.
- 1.7.19 In terms of the take up it has been suggested that many people have just got on with the work themselves, whilst others have not wanted to go through the process of getting quotes or wish to avoid highlighting that their property had been flooded.
- 1.7.20 The business support scheme has been very well used. There was greater flexibility for the Council and the local scheme was established quickly with the claims processed and paid by early June 2014. Initial visits to assess the position at every flooded business had also been undertaken during January 2014 by the Economic Development Team which had meant the Council had an accurate picture of the premises that had been affected.
- 1.7.21 Support to community businesses is continuing with the promotion of Business Continuity. Through central government funding, Price Waterhouse Coopers have been appointed to develop and promote a business continuity template, to run a series of seminars/workshops and to visit individual businesses at their premises. This action also satisfies Council duties under Civil Contingencies Act to advise and assist for continuance of commercial activities by the public.

## 1.8 Lessons learnt

- 1.8.1 Each of the different organisations have their own responsibilities and there are several changes that other agencies are making that need to be highlighted before moving on to the Council position.
- 1.8.2 The Environment Agency has revised and expanded the number of flood warning areas and is currently consulting on these proposals. Specific flood areas have now been established for Yalding and Little Venice and the Agency will also be focusing on the narrative that is produced alongside the warning. An informal briefing for Council Members will be held on 29<sup>th</sup> October to include this and the bids outlined below.
- 1.8.3 The emergency services have agreed that in future emergencies, a bronze command will be established near to all locations which will act as a central point in the vicinity. There were times earlier in the year that a clear local contact point was not established and therefore there was no central point for incident response including the Council's own Incident Liaison Officers. Also there was no single

location for the public or agencies to go to for support or co-ordination.

1.8.4 The provision of information and analysis to the decision makers has been discussed at length; in the case of the flooding the Environment Agency modeling was vital to decision making but the outcome was dependent on the weather and how the ground and rivers reacted. There is agreement that making people aware of the potential issues at an earlier stage may be more beneficial with a commentary provided. This was the case for the later flooding incidents.

1.8.5 In terms of longer term planning, bids have been submitted by the Environment Agency to increase the height of the Leigh Barrier and also look at a flood water storage site on the River Beult. Preliminary work is being undertaken and there has been government funding earmarked and a verbal commitment from the County Council to funding. It will be important for interested parties to continue to lobby and keep this issue on the agenda until a final decision is made.

In terms of the issues at a local level, these are set out below.

#### 1.8.6 Accommodation

1.8.7 There was some debate about whether the Council should have set up rest centres rather than accommodating people in hotels over the Christmas period. In many cases the insurance companies paid but it is very likely that during other times of the year there would not have been the capacity in the hotels. Although there are multiple locations across the borough detailed in the Rest Centre Directory, it is also doubtful that sufficient staff would have been available to run a single centre for the length of time that temporary accommodation was required.

1.8.8 Officers in housing visited all the people who had been placed with a focus on those that were classed as homeless. In subsequent flooding, a rest centre was also opened up in a neighbouring borough as that was the best location.

1.8.9 This was the first live event to test the Housing and Homelessness Plan and issues were evident around roles and responsibilities of partners such as Kent County Council Adult Social Care services with regards to offering hotel places, payment and the provision of meals.

1.8.10 It has been agreed that the Housing and Homelessness Plan should be updated by the Head of Housing and Community Services to cover the housing elements, responsibilities and legislation in conjunction with partners to ensure more effective multi agency working and communication in the future. In addition specialist staff in for

example housing and also the depot will also be identified separately in the Emergency Plan.

#### 1.8.11 Community Response Plans

1.8.12 Resources are available at a county and borough level to assist parishes and community groups in producing their own emergency plans. A suitable template has been developed by County and has been successfully rolled out and supported to a number of parish councils.

1.8.13 As stated above in 1.3.7, the one Kent approach needs to extend down to community plans in order to be fully effective but not all the parishes have taken up this offer. Since the flooding, several parishes have now worked more closely to have robust plans in place by the autumn. The importance of having co-ordinated plans should not be underestimated.

#### 1.8.14 Staffing

1.8.15 Whilst many Council staff had gone on leave over Christmas, the Council was still operating a skeleton staff like many other agencies across the county. Arrangements to provide strategic, tactical and operational support were in place as set out in the Council's Emergency Plan.

1.8.16 Whilst officers carried out their duties as planned, some staff also stepped up to more senior roles and demonstrated significant skills in the emergency situation. There were, however, times when resources were stretched to the limit, particularly over Christmas. As the flooding went on into the New Year there was a need to respond to the emergency situations as well as maintain day to day services.

1.8.17 Not all Council staff were available to be called on as the emergency plan is staffed on a voluntary basis. Whilst the vast majority responded positively, it is suggested that further work needs to be undertaken to look at making a recommendation for people to support emergencies as part of their employment contract.

1.8.18 An action has been created to investigate the number of existing staff employment contracts have emergency planning listed as a duty and also to ensure that this is in place for all new contracts. In addition there needs to be a strategy to ensure all staff are aware of this responsibility and the need to go on emergency planning training starting with a half day introduction course before being listed against a role in the Emergency Plan.

1.8.19 Although emergency planning may be in employment contracts, this new approach may not be welcomed by all staff and so needs to be handled carefully. Discussions are also taking place with neighbouring authorities in relation to staff that are now part of shared services and how they would operate in an emergency. Emergency Planning is however a statutory duty on the Council and this action is considered both reasonable and necessary to ensure this duty is satisfied.

1.8.20 Training and exercising for emergency planning is carried out continuously throughout the year through the Service Level Agreement with County Council. Its' effectiveness and training needs are reviewed annually.

1.8.21 Timely 2013/14 training took place on:

- Crisis management - November 2013
- Strategic leadership - February 2014
- Rest Centre managers - December 2013
- Business Continuity workshop - December 2013

1.8.22 Carrying out some of the administration functions in terms of staff planning, collation of records, updating information boards and logging decision-making became a particular challenge during this period. Quite often, it resulted in people staying well beyond their scheduled hours of work (12 hour shift), to ensure handovers were carried out and information boards updated. It is recommended that the emergency roles are also reviewed in terms of the administration arrangements, particularly to meet any inquiry requirements.

1.8.23 Communication – It has been openly acknowledged that the Council's out of hours answering service via the switchboard said the offices were closed from 12 noon on Christmas Eve and that some members of the public may have hung up before waiting to hear the alternative out of hour's telephone numbers. This was rectified as soon as it came to the Council's attention but as well as ensuring that staff are on hand for people to speak to, this has also raised the point of who the public should contact in an emergency or for particular services and the information that is available to the public.

1.8.24 In terms of who to contact in an emergency, the feedback from the public is that this could be clearer. A booklet 'What should I do in an Emergency' has been produced by the Kent Resilience Team. The booklet is available on their website and paper copies are also available in Gateways. The Council has received around 1,000 of these booklets and as well as putting these on display the Council is looking at how some of these can be distributed locally, particularly in the areas that were flooded. In addition on flooding matters, the Council has also been promoting the Environment Agency leaflet on

being prepared for an emergency situation. Overall, the starting point remains that if it is an emergency people should dial 999.

- 1.8.25 Several aspects of the Communication and Media Plan worked well with regular updates to the public through the website and two-way communication including social media and internally to officers and members via email. Public information was coordinated through the Strategic and Tactical Command Groups with other flooding information available on the Environment Agency and Met Office websites. Over 85% of residents in flood plain areas are currently signed up to the Environment Agency Flood Warning System but this level could still be further improved.
- 1.8.26 The communication arrangements between the agencies have been reviewed across the County. This has included when general awareness communication needs to take place and also recognising that weather conditions in particular can change quickly and how the various agencies are kept informed at the strategic and tactical meetings and between meetings. The communication between the agencies and the MBC Emergency Centre worked well but it has been suggested that the Centre contact number should be prominent in the Council's Emergency Plan and be re-circulated to the key agencies.
- 1.8.27 Sandbags
- 1.8.28 There was significant demand for sandbags by the public, primarily in the belief that these will stop water entering homes and a general assumption that it was a Council duty to provide them.
- 1.8.29 There is no duty on the Council to provide sandbags to households or businesses and the Council receives no funding to do so. Whilst sandbags offer some reassurance they are unlikely to prevent flood water entering a home and in most cases water actually entered through the floors and not through the doors.
- 1.8.30 Initially the Council used its stock of sandbags to protect key infrastructure such as the electrical substation by the river in the town centre and then to meet public requests. Through mutual aid and contacts through officers at the depot, the Council was able to continue to offer sandbags throughout the period and very few requests were refused. Eventually the Council distributed over 5,000.
- 1.8.31 Given the conditions, costs and delivery time involved, many sandbags were delivered in bulk to central locations such as parish halls. However, some views were expressed that residents were unclear as to where these locations were. The location and distribution of sandbags should therefore be detailed in our own plans as well as community or parish plans and made publically available.

#### 1.8.32 High Risk Sites

1.8.33 There were two sites in the borough that consumed significant agency and Council resources during the floods. The caravan park at Little Venice (which had to be evacuated several times) and the Brishing reservoir (which needed a permanent presence and regular monitoring). Further details are set out below.

#### 1.8.34 Little Venice

1.8.35 The caravan park is operated under a licence. The majority of caravans on the site are classed as 'holiday rentals' with only three residential properties. The site is in a flood risk area and as a result the caravans are designed to float if water levels rise. Occupiers on the site have in the past remained in their caravans when there are low levels of flooding.

1.8.36 The Council has sought to work with the site owner over the past months to look at the licence and additional conditions including under which the site will utilise a Flood Emergency Plan. The Environment Agency has also provided advice on Little Venice producing a flood emergency plan and has been working with the site on understanding the flooding issues. An initial draft of the flood emergency plan has been circulated to the people on the site and agencies for comment. The site manager has indicated that the final document will be in place by the end of October 2014.

1.8.37 Feedback from the National Flood Forum highlighted that there were a number of vulnerable people on the site and also indicated that in the past, the previous site manager had undertaken a series of checks and work in the autumn to ensure that the site was prepared for winter. This was something that residents wanted to see incorporated in a future plan for the site. The site owner has now put in place trained flood wardens who will be active on the site when there is a perceived flood risk and who will liaise with emergency services and the council should they require any assistance.

1.8.38 A proposed set of draft conditions has been finalised and agreed with the owner and they will be issued shortly. There will be a requirement on the owners of Little Venice to produce and maintain an acceptable evacuation plan for future events.

#### 1.8.39 Brishing Reservoir

1.8.40 Flooding at the Eastern end of The Quarries has been an ongoing problem during winter for many years. Emergency Planning teams and other agencies had very little information on this facility prior to

the flooding. Although planning permission had been granted by the Council, Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council is the statutory undertaker responsible for its operation.

- 1.8.41 The facility is intended to create a catchment area and water flow is regulated from the stream through a sluice gate into natural sink holes in the Quarries and Little Switzerland before making its way down to Loose Village. At the start of the incident, the sluice was operated to good effect and protected properties in the Quarries from flooding. The severity of this weather event and the fact that the sink holes have finite drainage potential resulted in the reservoir quickly reaching its capacity of 67000m<sup>3</sup> and overtopping.
- 1.8.42 Although the dam was designed to allow seepage through there was concern regards possible failure and inundation of the river valley. Design documents and further advice was obtained from the engineer responsible for designing the dam which went some way to allaying those concerns.
- 1.8.43 As the risk of failure could not be ruled out though, a range of actions were agreed with the Tactical Command Group including tankers from Kent County Council and a high pressure pump deployed by Kent Fire and Rescue Service discharging to a Southern Water sewer. This pump was a national resource and it was very fortunate this was made available. These actions contained the flow and eventually reduced the water level in the reservoir.
- 1.8.44 A management plan for the facility has been provided by the parish council and it is understood that a multi-agency meeting is being arranged by the Parish Council to assist and advise on updating the parish emergency plan and completion of the documents required under the Reservoirs Act. This will also discuss additional work and funding through the Environment Agency.
- 1.8.45 As we go into autumn and winter, careful management will be required by the Parish Council to keep levels as low as possible and therefore make maximum use of the facility in the future. Two way radios have been provided by the Council to assist in the operation, warden training has been offered by the Environment Agency as well as an educational tour of the Leigh Barrier.

## 1.9 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

- 1.9.1 The recommendations in this report satisfy the Council's duty under The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to plan and act to mitigate the effects of a major emergency incident.

1.9.2 The recommendations also satisfy the duty of The Act and the Council's commitment to partners to plan at a county level as part of the 'One Kent' approach.

1.9.3 It is important that lessons learned from this response are put into place. Not actioning the recommendations could be deemed a failure to satisfy the Council duty under The Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

1.10 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.10.1 Emergency Planning, (and Flood Planning in particular), contributes to the Corporate Objectives of strong, healthy and safe communities and the Council's response to flood management and Climate Change.

1.11 Risk Management

1.11.1 Failure to adequately meet our duties under the Civil Contingencies Act may:

- Leave us open to legal challenge from the County Council or Government;
- Be damaging to the Council's reputation as a major incident may be followed by a public inquiry; and
- Leave the Council open to claims for compensation.

1.12 Other Implications

1.12.1

1.	Financial	X
2.	Staffing	X
3.	Legal	
4.	Equality Impact Needs Assessment	
5.	Environmental/Sustainable Development	
6.	Community Safety	
7.	Human Rights Act	
8.	Procurement	
9.	Asset Management	

#### 1.12.2 Financial

- 1.12.3 The majority of actions come within the normal roles of the Emergency Planning Manager and various function heads and managers.
- 1.12.4 Other resources include the Service Level Agreement with the Kent Resilience Team.
- 1.12.5 The incident response costs over and above the Bellwin threshold have been claimed.
- 1.12.6 The DCLG has not yet ruled out compensation for the administration costs of the various support schemes.
- 1.12.7 The additional training identified can be financed from the existing emergency planning budget.

#### 1.12.8 Staffing

- 1.12.9 Ensuring that all staff are assigned and trained into an emergency plan role through inclusion in their job descriptions will increase resilience. Consideration need to be given to how staff can be included.
- 1.12.10 The Emergency Planning Manager duties are assigned to the Building Surveying Manager who recharges 20% of his post back to the Council. Once recovery work has been completed this is usually sufficient for annual emergency planning. Early consideration will need to be given to the level of support required in any future recovery phase in particular and whether this can be met through this arrangement.

**IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?**

**THIS BOX MUST BE COMPLETED**

Yes

No

If yes, this is a Key Decision because: .....

.....

Wards/Parishes affected: .....

.....

## APPENDIX A

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Work to date</b>	<b>Officer</b>
1	To support the National Flood Forum and Environment Agency with the identification and training of flood wardens	Assisting in providing self resilience of Little Venice and other communities	15 wardens trained Support continues to be provided identifying staff and offering facilities.	Emergency Planning Manager
2	To review the evacuation arrangements in terms of location of rest centres, staffing and the information that is provided to the public	To provide clarity in arrangements  To ensure sufficient suitably trained staff to open and run rest centres.	Review of Rest Centre Directory is almost complete	Emergency Planning Manager
3	To promote the Kent Resilience Forum Emergency handbook and the steps the public can take to be prepared for an emergency event in the future	To promote self resilience of households and communities	Handbook is published and a number received within the Communications Team and Gateway Wider circulation and promotion to be considered	Emergency Planning Manager Communications Manager
4	To review the Housing and Homeless Emergency Plan	To ensure clarity and adequacy of arrangements for temporary housing and ensure all partners are aware and agree with these arrangements	None to date	Head of Housing and Community Services
5	To support the development of co-ordinated local emergency plans in the parished areas	To ensure that emergency response under the "One Kent" approach extends and is coordinated with local communities to provide a greater degree of self resilience.	Support has been provided and offered to parishes affected but requires them to produce plans.  Plans are now complete or in progress for : <i>Boughton Monchelsea</i> <i>Boughton Malherbe</i> <i>Collier Street</i> <i>Staplehurst</i> <i>Tovil</i> <i>Lenham</i> <i>Yalding</i> <i>Little Venice</i>	Kent Resilience Team and Emergency Planning Manager
6	To identify additional administration resources in emergency planning arrangements	There are no resources allocated for administrative support in Emergency Planning which would assist in	Emergency plan roles revised with new role established and staff identified	Emergency Planning Manager

		review and production of up to date documents		
7	To make emergency planning support a requirement in all new job descriptions, contracts and appointments	To ensure that sufficient numbers of staff are available to provide an emergency response. A duty under The Civil Contingencies Act	Checks being made with HR	Emergency Planning Manager
8	To establish dedicated call answering as soon as any emergency situation occurs	To ensure that messages to the public are accurate and timely to warn and inform of actions to take during an emergency	There is agreement with the Contact Centre Manager. A new incident messaging system has been acquired and is currently being implemented	Communications Team Contact Centre Telephony
9	To further promote the flood warning system with the Environment Agency to residents	To ensure residents are aware of flood warnings directly through the Environment Agency in order to provide an element of self resilience and planning	The council promotes the system and flood advice through Borough Update and elsewhere. Work continues with the Environment Agency through the National Flood Forum work.	Environment Agency
10	Revision of Maidstone Multi Agency Flood Plan	Transformation of existing Flood Plan into a more operational document using revised KRF template	Pan Kent Plan material separated and main body of template populated. Work commenced on detailed local information and mapping for high risk areas	Emergency Planning Manager
11	That the Council continues to hold a stock of sandbags and publishes when and where sandbags supplies will be provided as part of a countywide plan	To ensure that the public and communities are aware of the councils duties in respect of sandbags	Work with communities on their local resilience plans and highlighting locations where sand bags can be purchased	Emergency Planning Manager Kent Resilience Team
12	To monitor the position on the flood plan arrangements at Little Venice Caravan Park and take any action that is required to ensure that robust plans are in place for the winter including a checklist	To ensure a high level of self- resilience and effective site management in evacuation triggers and plans	The condition of the licence to Little Venice has been adapted to place a duty on the site owners to provide effective evacuation plans in consultation with the Council and resilience partners	Little Venice owners Emergency Planning Manager Environmental Operations Manager Legal Services

13	To monitor with other agencies the Boughton Monchelsea parish council's approach to the Brishing reservoir, the management plans that are in place and the contingency arrangements.	To ensure that self resilience measures and reservoir management plans are in place that remove the need for the significant resources provided by all agencies at Christmas.	<p>An off-site inundation plan is close to completion.</p> <p>A parish emergency Plan has been produced but still requires further work around evacuation procedures within the Quarries.</p> <p>The Parish need to produce an on-site plan for this reservoir.</p> <p>The Parish Council has requested further support from the highway agency and environment agency due to drainage of the road and maintenance of the reservoir.</p> <p>2 way radios have been provided to Boughton Monchelsea parish council to assist in the control of the reservoir.</p>	Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council Kent Resilience Team Emergency Planning Manager
----	--	---	--	--