

Summary of Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Flood Report (22 Sept 2016)

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the issues relating to the Boxing Day Flood Events at two sessions on 23 March 2016 and 13 July 2016, which also involved senior representatives from Yorkshire Water and the Environment Agency.

The issues discussed included the economic impacts; the emergency response from the Civil Emergency bodies; the vital role of local authorities and local communities at the time of and in the aftermath of the floods; and emerging activity to improve resilience and preparedness for future flood events such as in relation to whole catchment based approaches and the potential greater contribution of Green Infrastructure.

The **key conclusions** from the Committee were:

- We need to learn from our experiences of responding to the Boxing Day Floods to ensure that the most vulnerable people and businesses receive focused help in the event of future floods.
- It is clearly important to address prevention and activity continues to be focused on this, but it is also critically important to invest in measures to improve the resilience of systems and infrastructure, as well as considering whole catchment approaches to land management to alleviate and minimise impacts upstream and downstream in time of excess precipitation.
- The economic cost and commercial impact on industry and tourism were significant and much greater than anticipated, with the after effects and economic impacts continuing to be felt today.
- Utility companies across the Country were a valuable and helpful resource which were could be called upon at very short notice to provide additional support and equipment to flood affected areas, providing necessary additional experienced resources to deal with incidents.
- There was confusion by the general public as to which agency(s) they should ask for help, and in some cases there was confusion within agencies themselves as to whether something was their responsibility or not.
- There is potential for reservoirs and other water industry assets to be used as part of mitigation strategies to reduce the speed of flow of upland waters, but this has to be balanced with the statutory duty to provide a clean water supply.
- Blocked drains and water pipes appeared to have played a role in exacerbating the level of flooding, and so ongoing maintenance of water systems and networks is critical.
- The role of flood wardens had proven to be invaluable during the incidents, as was the sharing of information via social media networks, although available resources and experiences were not of the same level across districts.
- Harmonisation of flood plain data and Local Planning Authority Development Plans would help support ensuring that development was resilient to flood risk.

The **10 key recommendations** arising from the conclusions were:

- 1) Work should be undertaken to examine the true cost of the floods to the City Region as part of the Leeds City Region Flood Review, including in terms of the business and tourism economies to inform future planning and funding bids to Government for flood infrastructure and flood damage relief funding.
- 2) The Leeds City Region Flood Review should also include an examination of infrastructure at risk of future flooding and the available resources to deal with any infrastructure deficiencies and flood resilience issues.
- 3) More should be done to explore further ways of working to make the best use of the capacity of Utility Companies in responding to flood events, building on the positive response experienced at the time of the Boxing Day floods.
- 4) The review of the Leeds City Region Green Infrastructure Strategy should adopt a whole catchment based approach to considering the role of green infrastructure in improving the long term resilience to potential flood events both upstream and downstream of rivers and other watercourses.
- 5) Resilience Frameworks should be developed for whole catchment areas including for flood plains, including providing a focus on commercial premises and the knock-on effect on businesses in general if critical communication infrastructure is affected by flood events.
- 6) The Combined Authority and Local Authorities should work with the emergency agencies to explore the appetite and opportunities for adopting a policy whereby whichever agency was on the scene first, dealt with the emergency; with any conciliation and resource costs between agencies being dealt with in a collaborative and positive manner after the flood event emergency has subsided.
- 7) Explore whether a single public emergency contact telephone number could be agreed across the Leeds City Region, for example, within an existing utility company call centre, to provide a more effective single contact point for the general public and for the dissemination of necessary information in times of emergency.
- 8) Similarly, explore with local authorities and relevant agencies the opportunity to better utilise modern social media to provide real-time information to the public about flood relief and emergency measures before and during flood incidents.
- 9) Explore with the insurance industry and Government the opportunities for a less complex loss adjustment approach, to provide a less onerous and streamlined process for individual residents or businesses after flood events.
- 10) Work with the Environment Agency, Government and Local Authorities to identify ongoing funding gaps for necessary flood infrastructure and flood resilience measures, and seek commitments to filling these funding gaps through the City Region's Devolution Deals; aligning different sources of funding, and making better use of the existing resources of all relevant bodies and agencies.