

6 : REPORT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

- 1 The following Notice of Motion was presented to Council by Mrs P M Crawford on 19 July 2001, where it was agreed to refer the Motion to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Environment of Buckinghamshire for further consideration as part of the Committee's current Review of Flooding:

“Flood Defence Officers were routinely appointed by Thames Water in each area. Since privatisation this no longer happens, therefore, this Council resolves to give urgent consideration to the appointment of a Flood Defence Officer whose responsibility will be to keep the water flowing in all those areas which are not under the jurisdiction of The Environment Agency; this would include amongst other areas of the County, most of Chesham and in particular those areas which suffered the most in Chesham and still have ongoing problems such as The Vale Pednornmead, where the voluntary water bailiff has recently retired.”

- 2 Mrs Crawford was invited to present her Motion to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that took place on 19 September 2001, where she provided members with a detailed explanation of her motives in submitting the Motion. In light of Mrs Crawford's presentation and the discussion that followed, the Committee requested that the Strategic Manager for Planning and Transportation undertake an initial assessment as to the impact/feasibility of the Motion for the appointment of a designated Flood Defence Officer (without requiring an additional resource allocation).
- 3 This assessment was prepared and presented to the Committee's 17 October 2001 meeting by the Cabinet Member for Planning and Transportation and the Area Manager for Chiltern and South Bucks. The assessment confirmed that existing budgets would not support the creation of new posts and that consequently, existing staff would have to be called upon to fulfil the role of an Officer such as that proposed in the Motion.
- 4 Therefore, the assessment proposed the establishment of named technical staff in each of the 3 Area Offices to have lead responsibility for highway flood related matters, whilst taking account of the existing roles and responsibilities of

Emergency Planning Staff. The officers' responsibility would be confined to highway flood related matters to remain within existing legislation defining the Council's areas of responsibility. Supported by the Area Coordinators to provide a proactive communications/public relations role, the key responsibilities of the officers would be as follows:

- Liaise proactively with other agencies (Environment Agency, Water Companies, District Councils) to establish clarity about the respective responsibilities, duties and actions for flooding issues on a district wide, site by site specific basis. This will include establishing clarity about how the respective responsibilities will be discharged by each agency. The liaison should take the form of regular multi-agency meetings - as a minimum. The progress and outcomes of the liaison shall be communicated, both internally and externally, with the help of the Local Area Co-coordinator.
- Alert Emergency Planning Staff when serious flooding occurs and/or a pattern of flooding across an area shows signs of developing (Emergency Planning Staff will do the same).
- Establish clarity about the County Councils duties and responsibilities, as highway authority.
- Encourage the District Council, in appropriate circumstances, to use the powers available to them within the Land Drainage Act 1991 - to ensure Riparian Owners fulfil their responsibilities for maintenance of ordinary watercourses.
- Promote actions and measures at known highway flooding sites in order to minimise flooding. Communicate the actions taken, both internally and externally, with the help of the Local Area Co-ordinator.
- Implement contingency plans to ameliorate flooding where it is not possible to prevent highway flooding. Communicate this both, internally and externally, with the help of the Local Area Co-ordinator.
- Press other agencies, riparian owners and the public to fulfil their duties and publicise their intentions and completed actions.

- Work with other agencies to collate local knowledge about watercourses, groundwater flooding etc and use this information to help others and us to address flooding problems.
 - Work with the Local Area Co-ordinator to proactively communicate widely, both internally and externally, about what the County Council and other agencies can or cannot achieve (before flooding occurs).
 - Work with the Local Area Co-ordinator to proactively keep Members, the public, partner councils and agencies updated with actions that the County Council is taking and encourage other agencies to do the same.
 - Help the Local Area Co-ordinators with press releases about flooding matters.
 - Issue an up to date list of the names and telephone numbers of the lead technical officers at each area office (and other agencies).
- 5 As part of the Committee's Review of Flooding, discussions relating to the Motion had also been held with the Flood Defence and Water Resource Manager of the Environment Agency. Following the discussion of the Motion at the Committee's 19 September 2001 meeting, the Environment Agency Officer had indicated that the Agency might be able to provide financial assistance to meet the costs of an Officer such as that proposed in the Motion. Therefore, the Strategic Manager for Planning and Transportation suggested that were such funding assistance to be forthcoming, the appointment of a single Officer with specific responsibility for flooding ought to be considered further. The Committee also suggested the possibility of seeking funding contributions for such an Officer from the County's District Councils.
- 6 The Committee welcomes the proposal put forward by the Strategic Manager for Planning and Transportation in response to the Motion and recommends its adoption by Council.

RICHARD PUSHMAN
CHAIRMAN