



# Minutes

## *TRANSPORT, ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE*

Minutes from the meeting held on Tuesday 8 September 2015, in Mezzanine Room 2, County Hall, Aylesbury, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 3.35 pm.

This meeting was webcast. To review the detailed discussions that took place, please see the webcast which can be found at <http://www.buckscc.public-i.tv/>  
The webcasts are retained on this website for 6 months. Recordings of any previous meetings beyond this can be requested (contact: [democracy@buckscc.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@buckscc.gov.uk))

### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Mrs P Birchley (Vice-Chairman), Mr T Butcher, Mr D Carroll (Chairman), Mr W Chapple OBE, Mrs A Davies and Mr P Gomm

### **OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE**

Mr L Buckingham, Ms G Chanell, Ms E Chilton, Mr S Dando, Mr A Durand, Ms K Fisher, Mr A Fyfe, Mr J Gibbons, Mr D Gilmour, Ms N Glover, Mr A Heeley, Mr M Hopkins, Mr T Kippax, Mr S Lambert, Ms C Moloney, Ms K Nelson, Ms A Nobbs, Mr T Parkins, Mr B Russell, Mr R Scott, Mr D Smith, Mr C Spreadborough, Mr N Stannett, Mrs K Sutherland (Secretary), Mr H Thomas, Mr D White and Mrs D White

#### **1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Mrs Lesley Clarke OBE.

#### **2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

David Carroll and Tim Butcher declared an interest as members whose divisions had suffered from flooding in 2013-14. In addition Phil Gomm declared an interest as a member of the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority.

#### **3 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2015 were confirmed as a correct record.



#### **4 FLOODING IN BUCKS 2013-14: LESSONS LEARNED - EVIDENCE SESSION WITH RESIDENTS**

The Chairman, David Carroll handed over to Mrs Patricia Birchley, Vice-Chairman explaining that she was leading the Flooding Inquiry and would chair the rest of the meeting. Mrs Birchley and the rest of the members of the Committee introduced themselves and the Chairman explained that Mrs Karen Fisher, Strategic Flood Management Team Leader, BCC and Mr Simon Dando, Contract Manager, Transport for Buckinghamshire were in attendance should the Committee need any technical advice during the meeting. The Chairman also advised residents in attendance that some members of the Committee had conducted site visits in Marlow, Hughenden Valley and The Willows.

##### ***Marlow***

The Chairman welcomed Mr Richard Scott, County Councillor, District Councillor and Town Councillor for Marlow to the meeting. Mr Scott gave the Committee a brief overview of the flooding experienced by Marlow residents in early 2014 and highlighted the following issues:

- Marlow has a history of flooding and in the 1970s houses were built on the flood plain which would not be permitted now. However the scale of the flooding in 2014 was extreme and was caused by a combination of rising river levels and excessive rainfall on ground which was already saturated due to a prolonged period of wet weather.
- Residents were unsure who to approach for help and some agencies, particularly the Environment Agency and Thames Water, proved very difficult to contact initially and were also slow to respond.
- The early flood warning system operated by the Environment Agency (EA) which the public can sign up to worked well – Mr Scott confirmed that he had received emails and text messages alerting him to rising river levels. However it was difficult to get accurate information from the EA once the flooding occurred.
- Wycombe District Council provided sandbags to Marlow but they disappeared very quickly and were not always being taken by those residents most in need. Eventually the Police played a role in co-ordinating the distribution of sandbags.
- There were issues with sewage in low lying areas of Marlow and Thames Water were very slow in addressing this. Sewage was mixing with the flood water in Higginson Park which caused concern.
- Bucks Fire and Rescue and the Military did a great job in keeping the water levels stable and were able to bring in pumps from other areas of the UK. The establishment of the Command and Control Centre in Pound Lane was also very helpful as it became a key centre for information and co-ordination of activities.
- Mr Scott hoped that the Inquiry would mean that lessons learned from the 2014 experience would lead to an improved response if flooding occurred again in future. He felt that improved communication with residents was important and that agencies needed to co-ordinate much more quickly. The early establishment of a Command and Control Centre would help to facilitate this. A more controlled distribution of sandbags would also be helpful and practical maintenance of drains and gullies on an ongoing basis was also important.
- Mr Scott thanked Buckinghamshire County Council for contributing funding to the Marlow Flood Alleviation Scheme which was now in the very early stages of construction. He hoped that this scheme and the valuable work done by the Town Clerk at Marlow in putting together the Marlow Community Flood Plan would help to protect the town if further flooding occurred in the future.

The Chairman thanked Mr Scott for his contribution and welcomed Mr Trevor Kippax, a resident of Marlow whose house was flooded in 2014. The Chairman invited Mr Kippax to share his experiences with the Committee and members then asked questions. The following main points were noted:

- Mr Kippax lived in Gossmore Lane, which along with Firview Close, was affected by a culvert running alongside the A404, which was meant to drain into the main river. Mr Kippax's home had four inches of water in the ground floor on the Sunday evening. Additional pumps were deployed on Monday and by Tuesday morning the water was completely gone from the house. He felt that if pumps had been deployed earlier this could have prevented his house flooding.
- Mr Kippax had been flooded in 2003 so he had a fairly good idea of who to contact when he was flooded again in 2014. He contacted the EA Floodline but this is a call centre in Sheffield and it was difficult to get local information. The local office was Wallingford but the number was not given out freely. He did eventually obtain this number which meant he was able to get more accurate information about the river levels.
- EA representatives visited Marlow at the time of the flooding, asked residents lots of questions and looked in their properties. They took contact details but residents had no further contact from the EA thereafter.
- After the 2003 flooding the EA had commissioned a study and then engaged Halcrow to design a flood protection scheme. However the scheme was flawed and by the time this was rectified the Defra funding had been allocated elsewhere. This has now developed into the new Marlow Flood Alleviation Scheme.
- Wycombe District Council (WDC) assisted residents by building a temporary bund across the culvert. A contractor built a temporary structure using sandbags and plastic. He advised Mr Kippax that he would have liked to have used blue clay to have waterproofed the structure but the EA advised that this would endanger wildlife and prohibited this.
- WDC also arranged for some pumping but this had a limited effect due to the high demand.
- Marlow Town Council were involved and managed to get Gossmore Lane closed to traffic, as cars trying to drive down the road were creating bow waves and pushing water into people's houses. Marlow Town Council was also instrumental in obtaining and distributing sandbags. Some residents in Firview Close were elderly or disabled and it was important that they should get sandbags, as they could not collect them themselves.
- Mr Kippax commented that he did not feel better prepared for a future flood event because local government has less resources and the two contacts he had at WDC have both left and have not been replaced. It is harder to get accurate information as it is filtered through more people and by the time you receive it, it is not of any practical use.
- Mr Kippax was asked if he felt that the flooding could have been averted if he had been able to get pumps in place at an earlier stage. He advised that he had asked for pumps 10 days before water got into the house, but sourcing pumps was difficult. In the end WDC provided pumps but it was not really their responsibility to do so and it was slightly too late.
- Karen Fisher explained that it was a difficult situation in Marlow as there was a mixture of river water, ground water and surface water and different agencies are responsible according to the type of flooding which occurs. Also there were sewage issues and the Highways Agency own the ditch alongside the A404 so there were 5 or 6 different agencies with different responsibilities which is why it can be complicated to organise a co-ordinated response.

The Chairman thanked Mr Kippax and Mr Scott for their contributions to the meeting.

### **Hughenden Valley**

The Chairman welcomed Mr David White, Mrs Debbie White and Mr Matt Hopkins, residents of Hughenden Valley to the meeting. Members noted that Mr White was also the Chairman of

the Hughenden Valley Drainage Improvement Group (HVDIG) which had been set up as a result of the flooding in 2014. Mr White presented an overview of the issues residents faced in Hughenden Valley. During the presentation and in answer to subsequent questions from members, the following main points were noted:

- The flooding situation in Hughenden Valley was not as catastrophic as that experienced along the River Thames in 2014, although it had a severe and disturbing impact on residents and it was frustrating because it could have been controlled and prevented using quite straightforward methods.
- The Chiltern Hills is a naturally high groundwater level region and contains a number of chalk streams with winterborne sections that only flow when the groundwater levels are high enough. Hughenden Stream is one of these chalk streams and the winterborne section in Hughenden Valley runs through Mr and Mrs White's back garden. It appears to flow every three to five years.
- The Thames Water sewage system in Hughenden Valley largely follows the course of the Hughenden Stream. As the valley has naturally high levels of groundwater, if there is prolonged rainfall the sewers begin to vent at vulnerable points. This venting can be controlled immediately by installing hydraulic pumps in manholes in the individual properties on Valley Road and when this venting occurred previously in 2001, Thames Water sent their contractors to Hughenden Valley to fit pumps at approximately 12 properties, which they then maintained and checked on a daily basis.
- In 2014 when Mr and Mrs White could see that sewers were beginning to vent on their property they contacted Thames Water again. Two days later a contractor arrived to assess the situation and advised that because the sewers were filled to capacity due to ingress of groundwater it was not their responsibility. Thames Water would clean up once the groundwater subsided but pumps would not be provided on this occasion.
- In order to prevent sewage ingressing into the house, Mr White removed bricks from his driveway to create a channel to try and direct the foul water down the garden to the stream. Residents resorted to buying their own pumps from Ebay. Some properties had no access to the Hughenden Stream so were pumping from their properties into Valley Road and were told by Transport for Buckinghamshire (TfB) staff that they had to stop pumping as they could be fined £10,000 by the Environment Agency. The EA subsequently told residents that they are within their rights to pump in order to protect their property and as long as they advise the EA of a potential pollution risk as a result of the pumping, they would not be prosecuted.
- It was a very frustrating situation as drainage contractors were in the village every day, taking photos but they were not allowed to intervene with pumps. Eventually the pavement along Valley Road became flooded with sewage, including a stretch of pavement by the bus stop where school children meet to catch the bus to school in High Wycombe. TfB and WDC Environmental Health were advised of the health risks for the children there but no-one took any action so again residents put up their own warning signs to alert the children to the problem.
- The situation was finally resolved when residents spoke to the local press and contacted their local MP, David Lidington and David Carroll, their local Councillor. Thames Water reacted by installing two six inch pumps which ran for twenty four hours a day to remove sewage from the affected properties. In addition a blockage in the drain under the main road was cleared. Initially Thames Water refused to reimburse residents for the pumps they had purchased but after pressure from the Consumer Council for Water, residents have now been compensated.
- The Environment Agency were very helpful, giving advice on how best to manage pumping into the stream and suggested setting up the DIG based on a model they had seen elsewhere. Since the creation of the DIG, Thames Water have been responsive, carrying out a lot of work on their network in Hughenden Valley and have allocated specific pumps for Hughenden Valley should this situation arise again in future.
- David Lidington MP and Mr White have undertaken lengthy correspondence with OFWAT to try to establish who is legally responsible in flooding situations as the

legislation is unclear. A member suggested that David Lidington should take this up and ask Parliament to review the legislation.

- One of the issues in Bucks is that there is a conflict of interest because BCC is often the landowner which has riparian responsibilities along a watercourse, yet BCC also has the enforcement responsibilities. Mr White had written to the Chief Executive to clarify this issue.
- Mr White also expressed the view that culverting work undertaken in Boss Lane after the 2001 flooding incident exacerbated the 2014 situation, because it was incorrectly engineered. The gradient was not sufficient for under road culverting so water backs up. Also pipes under the road for surface water and the ditch on the Village Hall Side of the road that they feed into, had not been properly maintained.
- Karen Fisher advised that her team had some funding for a possible scheme in Hughenden Valley. Some CCTV surveys had been undertaken which would enable further modelling work.

The Chairman thanked Mr and Mrs White and Mr Hopkins for attending the meeting.

## **The Willows**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Steven Lambert, County, District and Parish Councillor for The Willows and Mr Lee Buckingham, Mr Andre Durand and Mr and Mrs Chris Spreadborough, residents of The Willows, Aylesbury to the meeting. The residents and Mr Lambert presented a brief overview of the flood events at The Willows, before taking questions from members. The following main points were noted:

- Some areas of The Willows estate around Lupin Walk flooded on Christmas Eve 2013. Water rose up again in January but the worst incident occurred on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2014, when 80 homes were flooded.
- There were a number of issues which combined and contributed to this flood event. Residents believed that the culvert beneath the Oxford Road was blocked which led to the Stoke Brook breaking its banks, although this had been denied by the Environment Agency (EA). This was further compounded by surface water flooding.
- Residents felt they had received very little assistance in the early stages of the flood. An on-call fireman attended the scene but it was not assessed as an emergency. Residents did not know who to call for help. Mr Lambert contacted the EA at 5.30am and spoke to a member of staff in Northern Ireland who advised him to call back again later.
- Residents thanked Kerr Construction workers who responded to a tweet and delivered sand and helped to fill sandbags for the estate. In addition to the problems of obtaining sandbags during the flooding, there were also issues in disposal after the water subsided, as again no-one wanted to take responsibility for the clean-up operation.
- The Willows situation was quite complicated due to the number of agencies which had riparian responsibilities. Karen Fisher confirmed that BCC or the Environment Agency could undertake maintenance work and then claim expenses back from the riparian owner if necessary but a partnership approach was far preferable to going down this enforcement route.
- Mr Lambert paid tribute to the joint working that had taken place since the flooding and to the residents who have set up a flooding action group to try and drive improvements through. The group has been supported by BCC's Strategic Flood Management team, AVDC, Aylesbury Town Council, Thames Water and the Environment Agency. Karen Fisher and her team had been exemplary.
- Thames Water had recently fitted flap valves to the gullies which run out into the Stoke Brook and when Members visited the site, some of these were stuck closed. Mr Lambert explained that discussions were taking place with Thames Water about various methods which could rectify this problem.

- Mr Spreadborough reported that he had sent emails in January 2014 complaining about the lack of maintenance of the Stoke Brook and the ditch in Ellen Road on the other side of the estate. He finally received a response in February, in which Aylesbury Vale District Council (AVDC) stated that they had undertaken maintenance work in January and were satisfied with the standard of this work – the following day the estate flooded.
- In response to a question about insurance, some residents indicated that the premiums had remained the same whilst others had found their insurance had doubled in price. The Chairman advised the residents that the Government were establishing a scheme called Flood Re which would help people who had difficulty obtaining insurance due to flooding.
- A member noted that AVDC's Environment and Living Scrutiny Committee had received a report on the Flooding in November 2014 and asked if any further follow up was happening. Emma Chilton of AVDC, who was in the public gallery, advised that their Scrutiny Committee would be receiving an update at its meeting in November 2015.
- Mr Lambert paid tribute to the residents of the Willows who have pooled the money they received from Government in the form of a Repair and Renew grant and this £350,000 funding has been used to purchase a trash screen for the brook, several pumps and some temporary flood defences. A logistics plan is now being put in place to clarify how these defences can be deployed and when and the residents are looking at developing their own emergency plan.
- Mr Lambert advised Members that he was very involved at The Willows, from knocking on people's doors in the early hours of the morning to tell them they were being flooded, right through to pressing for the recent purchase of the flood defences. However he had not really understood which agencies had a duty to act in that situation, even with his experience of serving as a County, District and Parish Councillor. This was perhaps a learning point for the Committee to consider.

The Chairman thanked Mr Lambert and the residents of The Willows for attending the meeting.

## **5 CHAIRMAN'S SUMMING UP**

The Chairman commented that the Committee had tremendous sympathy for anyone who had suffered during the flooding of 2013-14 and it was clear from residents' stories that there was a real need for agencies to respond more quickly when local residents raised the alarm. Whilst the legislation around flooding was complicated and the onus was on the individual householder to protect his property, the relevant agencies needed to co-ordinate better during an emergency and riparian owners needed to play their part in the ongoing maintenance of watercourses, drains and ditches to prevent problems in future.

The Chairman thanked everyone who had contributed to the morning session. The meeting was adjourned until 1pm.

*The meeting recommenced at 1pm.*

## **6 FLOODING IN BUCKS 2013-14: LESSONS LEARNED - EVIDENCE SESSION WITH PARTNER AGENCIES**

The Chairman advised that the Committee had heard from residents in the morning session and this afternoon would be an opportunity for partner agencies to explain how they managed demand and prioritised their response during the flooding of 2013-14.

The Chairman welcomed Mr Barry Russell, Operations Manager, Environment Agency to the meeting. Mr Russell briefly explained the large area that his team covers, Upper Thames and outlined his history of working for the Environment Agency (EA). Mr Russell was the Lead for

the Environment Agency at the Strategic Command Group at Kidlington throughout the flooding of 2013/14.

Mr Russell gave a presentation before taking questions from members. and the following main points were noted:

- The winter of 2013-14 was the wettest on record with a large number of properties flooded nationally. 157 flood warnings were issued across West Thames, with 14 severe flood warnings across December, January and February. Thresholds have since been reviewed for issuing flood warnings in West Thames as the EA want to be as accurate as possible.
- 1400 properties suffered internal flooding with a further 300 affected by ground water flooding. The EA opened an Emergency Centre and Regional Incident Rooms which were open 24/7. More than 600 staff were working in the incident rooms, as well as operational staff making sure defences were deployed. Field teams were also out checking water levels.
- The duration of rainfall created further issues that short duration, high intensity rain does not bring, with the soil at saturation point in November 2013. The ongoing rainfall kept the River Thames at capacity – the highest level it had reached in 65 years.
- Since the flooding, the EA have participated in internal and partner agency debriefs and the plans of Local Resilience Forums had been updated. The EA had also worked with partners running training days and testing equipment.
- For The Willows, Aylesbury no flood warning was issued as the watercourse was not one that the EA are responsible for. The EA have supported the work of The Willows Flood Group and have worked in partnership with BCC, AVDC and residents. AVDC have stepped up their riparian responsibilities and regularly inspect the waterway and the newly fitted trash screen on the Stoke Brook is on the EA's fortnightly inspection schedule.
- The EA have supported the work of the Hughenden Valley DIG and have undertaken an initial assessment of the top of the Hughenden Stream.
- In Marlow, partnership working was taking place across Local Authorities in respect of the Marlow Flood Alleviation Scheme which would protect 287 properties. Preliminary works had taken place at Gossmore Lane raising the road to keep planning permission current whilst further discussions with landowners and an archaeological and ecological survey take place.
- The Chairman asked how the EA could react more quickly to warnings from residents on the ground. Mr Russell explained that a lot of work had been done with the Local Resilience Forum to try and improve multi-agency response. The EA work with flood action groups to educate them on how they can help themselves in a flood situation. The EA operate an incident room where the call handlers collect local intelligence and then pass this up to the strategic SEG, who make decisions on resources. In 2014, the full length of the River Thames was affected and therefore some areas may have felt that they did not receive support as quickly as they would want but the EA had to deploy resources as best as we could. The EA would not be looking to take action against residents who were trying to protect their homes.
- A Member raised the issue of lack of communication between agencies. Mr Russell commented that the response of partners was better in 2014 was significantly better than in the past. Systems fed local intelligence through to SEG very quickly and the EA have dedicated laptops for use in an emergency.
- The EA's number one objective is to protect human life in a flood emergency. However when the EA are putting in a scheme they do have to consider the impact on wildlife, flora and fauna, as well as the protection of local people.
- Dredging can sometimes provide additional capacity in a river but because the River Thames is a modified river with weirs and bridges, dredging is not always appropriate.
- Mr Russell advised that over 45,000 properties were issued with flood warnings varying from populated areas to more rural communities. A large number of gauges throughout

the River Thames have thresholds which when exceeded sound an alarm. Flood warnings are then sent direct to people pre-registered on the Flood Warnings Direct scheme. This would not work for residents in areas who did not anticipate being flooded, but the EA liaise via partners to publicise warnings such as BCC, District Councils, Parish Councils etc

- Mr Russell agreed that if someone is being flooded they do not care who is responsible for the different sources of flood water and the EA will respond to residents in a serious flood situation even if it is not caused by main river flooding. However in terms of providing solutions, the agency responsible for the source of the water does come into play due to the funding which is needed for flood alleviation schemes.
- Groundwater flooding is very different to river flooding. The EA are trialling groundwater flooding warning in some areas but this is in its infancy.
- The EA call centre in Sheffield has good IT systems which can pinpoint the source of a call accurately and Mr Russell was not aware of delays in message being relayed. The call centre number is 0800 80 70 60.
- There could be more training for front line staff in all agencies on the finer points of the Flood Acts and which agency is responsible for different sources of flooding.
- In Buckinghamshire there were many proactive land owners, but others did not take their riparian maintenance duties seriously. Mr Russell advised that peer pressure had a positive effect, particularly when a flood action group has been formed. The EA has permissive powers to visit land and complete works and then re-charge owners but this was not the best use of resources. More recently the EA have facilitated farmer demonstrations to show what can be done and how and where the EA can support landowners.

The Chairman thanked Mr Russell for his presentation and for answering Members' questions.

## **Thames Water**

The Chairman welcomed Huw Thomas, Local/Regional Government Liaison, Karen Nelson, Operations Manager and Chris Moloney, Operational Control Manager of Thames Water to the meeting

Mr Thomas gave a presentation before taking Members' questions. The following main points were noted:

- Thames Water covers a large area stretching from Cheltenham right across to London, Essex and Kent. Groundwater flooding continued after river levels subsided with issues affecting some pumping stations as late as May 2014.
- The sewers are a low lying asset and because the system is not sealed, to avoid a build-up of noxious gases, the sewers are vulnerable to groundwater.
- Sewage treatment works were inundated and at full capacity. Tankers were used to help people who were internally flooded with sewage and to protect Thames Water's own assets.
- In Hughenden Valley, residents who had experienced flooding in 2001 had been satisfied with the response from Thames Water at that time, however in 2014 residents were informed that they would only receive help if their properties were flooded internally. Mr Thomas explained that due to the sheer scale of the issues in 2014, external flooding was not a priority. A series of drainage solutions have subsequently been developed, including one for Hughenden. A mobile filtration kit is now available that can be deployed to sites identified. Ms Nelson explained that Hughenden has progressed further than other areas, with assets already installed to enable the mobile equipment to be deployed. The mobile treatment kits will be stored at strategic locations in Cirencester and Little Marlow.
- Residents of The Willows reported that Thames Water did not come out to clear up sewage, leaving the residents to clean up and take it to a waste disposal dump. Mr Thomas advised that contractors were sent out to clean up some areas, but were

making little difference due to the ongoing rainfall. Now their contractors, Lanes Drains were in place which would lead to improvements in future.

- Residents of The Willows had also raised concerns about newly fitted flap valves that were already locked in the shut position due to silt in the Stoke Brook. Ms Nelson added that silt is a known problem with flap valves and she was in discussions with Alex Batt of BCC's Strategic Flood Risk Management team about the possibility of fitting sleepers in the brook to control water flow and silt deposits, so that the flap valves will operate correctly.
- In Chalfont St Peter, sewage had flowed onto the A413 continually for three days and residents, the parish council and the local County Councillor, David Martin all reported difficulties in contacting Thames Water. Mr Thomas explained that he had met with Councillor David Martin in Chalfont St Peter at the time and accepted that it had taken a number of days to resolve the flooding. Mr Thomas re-iterated that this is another area prioritised for the emergency mobile filtration kit and detailed drainage surveys have subsequently been carried out. Last year it took a few days to obtain permission from the EA to pump sewage into the River Misbourne, but in future this would not take as long, due to improved partnership working with the EA and better understanding of the drainage issues in that area.
- Chris Moloney explained that the automated telephone system used by Thames Water in 2014 was necessary due to the high volume of calls they were receiving. The automated voice added to the front of the call system tried to redirect callers to other agencies where appropriate. Additional staff were added to the nightshift and the call centre was open 24 hours a day in an attempt to answer as many calls as possible.
- Thames Water has a specific telephone number which is provided to emergency planners, emergency services and key local authority members which bypasses the public telephone line. The line is handled by a limited number of people so if it was to be passed on to an elected member it must be used respectfully. A Member reminded the Thames Water representatives that each County Councillor represents approximately 8,000 people so giving them a dedicated number could reduce the number of calls coming through on the public line. Ms Nelson confirmed that Thames Water also uses social media to get messages out and this has been really helpful.
- Mr Thomas advised that Thames Water work closely with planning authorities and spoke of the new SUDS (Sustainable Drainage) regime which in theory should prevent surface water from new developments being passed on. Thames Water are not statutory consultees for planning applications although they do provide feedback.

The Chairman thanked Mr Thomas, Ms Nelson and Ms Moloney for attending the meeting and Mr Thomas gave assurances that Thames Water would be happy to attend meetings of local flood action groups in Buckinghamshire if they were invited.

## **Bucks Fire and Rescue**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Tim Parkins, Performance and Evaluation and Projects Team Leader, Bucks Fire and Rescue Service to the meeting. Mr Parkins had submitted a Flood Debrief report to members ahead of the meeting and took questions from Members. The following main points were noted:

- Mr Parkins explained that the Fire Service did not just respond to incidents in Bucks in 2014 but also in other areas within Thames Valley. An internal debrief and national debrief were completed to identify what was done well and what could have been done differently. The reports collated internal staff feedback and comments from members of the public, which on the whole were very positive.
- Mr Parkins spoke very positively about multi-agency communications. Marlow was identified as a high risk area which required national assets to be brought in and a Command and Control unit was set up in the Pound Lane car park which became the

focal point where all multi agency briefings took place. At Headquarters senior officers were involved in teleconferences and there was good communication.

- It was estimated that the flooding placed an additional cost to the Fire Service of approximately £55,000 which was claimed back from Government under the Bellwin Scheme. This included an invoice from Staffordshire for £26,000 for the deployment of a high volume pump. The Fire and Rescue Service were one of the last agencies to leave Marlow in 2014.
- The Fire and Rescue Service has two boats available, one stored at Newport Pagnell and one stored at Beaconsfield and each station in Bucks has members trained to go out in dry suits. Recently new towing vehicles with off road capability had been purchased. Mr Parkins clarified that much of the equipment is not only designed for use during floods. These are also used when people come in to difficulty in water.
- Mr Parkins was asked what local communities could do to help themselves in a flood situation. Mr Parkins advised that residents should be encouraged to start local flood groups. Local people have knowledge of the vulnerable in their particular area and he had been involved in good community work in Buckingham, where severe flooding has been experienced in the past. The Fire and Rescue Service were always happy to work with communities on flood prevention.

The Chairman thanked Mr Parkins for attending the meeting and on behalf of the people of Buckinghamshire, she thanked the Fire and Rescue Service for all their hard work during the Winter floods of 2013-14.

## **District Councils**

The Chairman welcomed representatives from all four District Councils, namely Glynis Chanell, Chiltern District Council, Neil Stannett, Wycombe District Council, David Gilmour, South Bucks District Council and Emma Chilton and Adam Heeley, Aylesbury Vale District Council. The District Council representatives were happy to take Member's questions and the following main points were noted:

- The Chairman asked the AVDC representatives for their views on the effectiveness of partnership working during the flooding at The Willows in February 2014. Ms Chilton advised that partnership working was limited on the day of the floods. AVDC had issued their full stock of 2,000 sandbags out to residents of the Willows by 7am and then TfB provided further sandbags through an ad-hoc mutual aid agreement with the County Council. As there was no formal request for a Local Authority Liaison Officer (LALO) no officers from AVDC were sent to the estate. Ms Chilton accepted that this was an oversight and should have happened. Many lessons had been learnt by AVDC and their own Environment and Living Select Committee had investigated their response. Partnership working had definitely improved since the floods and the Repair and Renew grant project was a good example of how effective partnership working could be.
- The issue of sandbags was recognised as contentious one, as Local Authorities are not responsible for providing sandbags but often do it out of moral duty. It was identified that this is an issue that needs to be considered for the future with flood plans now being developed. Mr Gilmour advised that South Bucks keep a limited stock of gel bags. In 2014, some areas were impacted by the river suddenly bursting its banks and sandbagging would not have been appropriate. Wycombe District Council provided approximately 15,000 sandbags in Marlow over the course of the flooding and volunteers helped the vulnerable. The contractor was said to have worked extremely well to keep up with demand. Sandbags and toilet facilities were also provided for flooded properties in Hughenden. Chiltern District Council had gel bags issued to those at risk of flooding, initially 2,000 with a supplier restocking within 24 hours. Disposal was handled by a Waste contractor
- The District Councils also gave advice on infectious disease control, tried to keep information on their websites up to date and fostered communications locally. It was also the District Council's responsibility to establish rest centres if they were needed.

- Some residents of the Willows had reported that routine maintenance duties had not all been completed. A Member asked where responsibility lies. Ms Chilton explained that AVDC had undertaken all of their duties on land which they own. The ditch on Ellen Road and some car parking areas are not AVDC land. A Member suggested that it might help residents understanding if there was a map which detailed the different landowners on the estate. Ms Chilton agreed to provide this information.

**Action: Ms Chilton**

- A Member asked how recommendations in the Section 19 reports by the Lead Local Flood Authority have been approached. Mr Gilmour confirmed that flood Repair and Renew grants had been issued to New Denham residents. Ms Chilton confirmed all section 19 recommendations had been completed by AVDC but she expressed the view that some residents of The Willows were still living in ignorance of the flood risks. Members were also advised that it was challenging to implement flood alleviation schemes, as with Local Authority budget cuts it was a risk to authorise feasibility studies when ultimately there was no guarantee that work could be funded.
- District Councils commented that it was difficult to get engage with residents, even in areas that had been flooded previously. In light of funding cuts in the public sector, encouraging community resilience could be a valuable way of bridging the gap. Parish and Town Councils and community groups could play an important role in focussing on the vulnerable in their area during an emergency situation. A Member commented that officers should visit each Local Area Forum to promote this message.

The Chairman thanked all the District Council representatives for attending the meeting.

## **Regional Flood and Coastal Committee**

The Chairman welcomed Mrs Amanda Nobbs, Chairman of the Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee to the meeting. Mrs Nobbs provided the Committee with an overview of the role of the Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee before taking Members' questions. The following main points were noted:

- The Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee is one of 12 regional committees across the UK and covers a large area which includes 47 upper tier authorities. The Committee has three main roles - to ensure coordinated plans across organisations; approving the investment programme to manage flood risk across the Thames catchment and ensuring that local authorities, utility companies and other agencies work together. The Committee has a large number of members with various areas of expertise.
- Flood risk cannot be tackled with an annual investment programme, so a six year programme was now being considered to address risks both large and small, ranging from longer term large projects to smaller community ones. The Committee was able to raise funding through a Council Tax levy and by promoting joint working on projects, further Government funding could be awarded and greater efficiencies could also be achieved.
- The Chairman commented that residents had experienced difficulties in obtaining a quick response when they raised the alarm during the flooding. Amanda Nobbs noted that this resonated with other areas and advised that there needed to be a system which responded to community feedback quickly.
- Ms Nobbs explained that the Government is trying to promote more sophisticated and effective measures to protect properties from flooding rather than relying on sandbags.
- Many plans have been made nationally to protect against flooding and moving defences as well as bringing in temporary defences.
- The Committee were advised that BCC and other members of the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee can propose projects for funding. The Marlow Flood Alleviation Scheme is part-funded by the Committee.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Nobbs for attending the meeting and confirmed that the Committee would share their findings with her in due course. Members also extended their thanks to all the BCC officers who had supported the Committee's Flooding Inquiry. A further meeting of the Committee would be arranged to enable Members to consider all the evidence they had gathered and develop recommendations for their report which would be presented to Cabinet later in the Autumn. A date would be circulated to Members after the meeting.

**Action: Committee Adviser**

## **7 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will take place on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> November 2015 at 10am in Mezzanine Room 2, County Hall, Aylesbury. There will be a pre-meeting for Committee Members at 9.30am.

**CHAIRMAN**