Leeds CITY COUNCIL

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Report of the Head of Risk and Emergency Planning

Inner South Area Committee

Date: 17 December 2008

Subject: Update on Flood Risk Management

Electoral Wards Affected:	**Specific Implications For:**
All	Equality and Diversity ☐
	Community Cohesion ☐
☐ Ward Members consulted (referred to in report)	Narrowing the Gap ☐

Council Function	X	Delegated Executive Function available for Call In	☐	Delegated Executive Function not available for Call In Details set out in the report	☐

Executive Summary

This reports supports a presentation by the Council's Water Asset Management Working Group (WAMWG) on recent work undertaken to improve the management of flood risk both nationally and locally and the implications of this for the Inner South Area.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

This reports supports a presentation by the Council's Water Asset Management Working Group (WAMWG) on recent work undertaken to improve the management of flood risk both nationally and locally and the implications of this for the Inner South Area.

2.0 Background Information

2.1 In August 2004 and May 2005 parts of Leeds experienced significant flooding due to intense rainfall and the inability of the drainage infrastructure to cope with the volumes of water. The incidents highlighted areas for improvement in terms of the resources available to maintain our assets and respond to floods. In response to these events, the Council set-up WAMWG to develop recommendations for improving our management of flood risk. The group developed an Action Plan which was approved in July 2005 along with an additional £1.1m of revenue funding to implement the recommendations. Although this work is on-going, officers have made consistently good progress in making the city more resilient to flood risk.

3.0 Main Issues

3.1 Our experience of recent events suggests that improvements in our capabilities, particularly the maintenance of drainage assets, is already making a positive impact on the severity of flooding in at-risk areas. However, a good deal of work remains to be done and the improvements will not eliminate the risk of flooding during severe weather events. In June 2007, three severe rainfall events in quick succession led to the flooding of 250 - 300 domestic properties city-wide with many residential areas badly affected by flooding from watercourses (e.g. Farnley Wood Beck) as well as surface water run-off as the ground and drainage infrastructure were unable to absorb extreme volumes of water. Further significant, but less severe, flooding occurred again in Leeds on 21 January 2008.

3.2 Following the flooding in 2007, the Government commissioned the independent Pitt Review to investigate what happened and what could be done to address flood risk better. The Review's final report, 'Learning Lessons from the 2007 Floods', was issued in June 2008 and contains 92 final recommendations which aim to transform the management of flood risk at both the national and local levels. Council officers played a significant role in shaping the Review's final outcomes as can be seen from the report's multiple citations (see Appendix 1). Although the Government will not provide its formal response to the Review until late November, it is clear that it is likely to accept most of the recommendations. Around 29 of the recommendations relate directly to responsibilities or functions of local authorities, but the key item is recommendation 14 which states that: "local authorities should lead on the management of local flood risk with the support of the relevant organisations". The way in which the Pitt Review foresees this working is set out in Appendix 2 below.

3.3 It is essential that we improve our policies and strategies for managing flood risk at the national, regional and district levels. For this reason, members of WAMWG have sought to provide regular updates on our progress to elected members through updates to Executive Board and annual reports distributed by e-mail to all members. Similarly, we have provided regular updates to senior officers through updates to CLT and the Director of City Development.

3.4 Whilst this is important, the real impact of actual flooding is felt primarily at the local level, by the communities and households affected. With this presentation we would therefore now like to take the opportunity to provide members of Area Committees with a more detailed understanding of what is being to address flood risk a city-wide basis and also in relation to specific flood risks lying within their area. This presentation will provide members with the opportunity to consider what role the Area Committee and Area Management could or should be playing within this agenda to help us inform our programme of work.

4.0 Implications For Council Policy and Governance

4.1 This work is in fulfillment of the Council policy on 'Maintaining Water Resources and Responding to Flood Incidents' which we intend to review in light of the Government's response to the Pitt Review.

5.0 Legal and Resource Implications

There are no legal or resource implications arising from this update.

6.0 Conclusions

Following major flooding in 2004/5, WAMWG implemented a range of actions to enhance local flood risk management. The Pitt Review has made recommendations for more robust flood risk management at all levels with a central role envisaged for councils. WAMWG now seeks to engage Area Committees better on this agenda.

7.0 Recommendations

Inner South Area Committee is requested to note the contents of the presentation and offer feedback on its potential role in supporting and progressing improvements in the management of flood risk.

Background papers

None

Appendix 1

Leeds leads

"In principle, the concept of a local authority leading or co-ordinating a statutory-based partnership of stakeholders, each with a role in ensuring that there is an effective, proportionate and funded strategy towards the management of flood risk at the 'local level', is something we would welcome and mirrors the situation we are working towards in Leeds." – Leeds City Council

Leeds City Council

Leeds experienced serious flooding in 2005, with more minor flooding occurring during the summer of 2007. Leeds City Council put in place a Water Asset Management Working Group with an action plan and budget of approximately £1 million per annum. The majority of this budget has been spent on centralising the maintenance of Leeds City Council's watercourses through a process of identifying and recording their location and condition and thereby developing a maintenance regime accordingly.

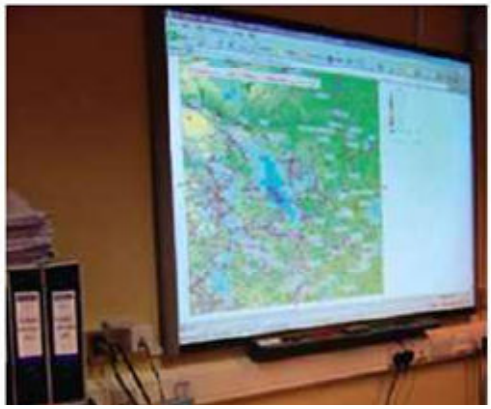
This process has included:

- inspection of culverts using CCTV and recording their location and condition;
- improving GIS records of assets and locating gullies using GPS;
- risk assessment of hazardous bodies of water (e.g. Waterloo Lake);
- recruiting additional land drainage staff;
- performing a fortnightly pre-emptive clearance of drainage hotspots; and
- A 50 per cent increase in its fleet of gully-sucking vehicles.

Map of culverts in Leeds

Map of gullies in Leeds

and Leeds City Council is in favour of weather radar being used to help emergency responders ensure that resources are targeted at the most vulnerable areas during an emergency. They have purchased licences to provide live access to the Met Office's rainfall radar data, using a system called 'Enviromet', to officers in land drainage, emergency planning and highway maintenance. This enables them to identify which areas are being worst affected (and which are most likely to flood) and therefore target resources accordingly.



Learning lessons from the 2007 floods

Surface water flooding: evidence from Leeds City Council about effects of law on water companies

The Water Industry Act, 1991 (s.94) says: "It shall be the duty of every sewerage undertaker [i.e. water company] ... to provide, improve and extend such a system of public sewers (whether inside its area or elsewhere) and so to cleanse and maintain those sewers as to ensure that that area is and continues to be effectually drained" ... and yet the water companies refuse to see it as their responsibility when houses are knee-deep in water that has run off fields and highways.

The reason the water companies give is that the legislation only empowers them to provide sewers and 'sewers' are defined elsewhere as drains serving 'premises' (not open land). In many parts of Leeds, in common with other urban areas, there are no natural watercourses. Consequently, if the overland flows cannot soak away (due to clay-rich soil) or go into the sewers, there is no solution that any body or authority has a duty to implement. Section 94, which was originally a duty on local authorities in the Public Health Act 1936, has thus been rendered meaningless.

Appendix 2

Overview of Proposed New Approach to Flood Risk Management