
Report of the Director of Development

Scrutiny Board (Development)

Date: 10 October 2006

Subject: Report on Progress of Water Asset Management Working Group

Electoral Wards Affected:

All

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Executive Summary

1. The Water Asset Management Working Group was set-up following a report to Executive Board in March 2005 on a series of flooding incidents affecting houses in Leeds in August 2004. The Group aimed to: (i) review the Council's approach to maintaining its water assets and responding to flooding incidents; and (ii) draw-up and implement proposals to respond to the issues identified.
2. WAMWG and the departments concerned have continued to make good progress on implementing its initial recommendations. This report provides an update on its progress.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the on-going development and implementation of detailed proposals by the Water Asset Management Working Group (WAMWG) in response to major flooding incidents in Leeds in 2004 and 2005.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 In August 2004 and May 2005 several areas of Leeds experienced significant flooding which highlighted areas for potential improvement by the Council and its partners in terms of: (i) the resources available to maintain our assets and respond to floods; (ii) key players' understanding of their responsibilities relating to water; and (iii) the level of co-operation between agencies with responsibilities for water maintenance and enforcement.
- 2.2 In March 2005 Executive Board approved the set-up of a cross-departmental working group (WAMWG) to develop costed recommendations for implementation. WAMWG reported its initial proposals to Corporate Management Team in June 2005 which led to the release of £503,380 to begin their implementation. Additional full-year funding of £1.1 million per annum was approved as part of the 2006/7 budget and is to be provided on an on-going basis.
- 2.3 On 17 May 2006 WAMWG reported to Executive Board on its progress and received approval for a new 'Policy on Maintaining Water Resources and Responding to Flood Incidents'.
- 2.4 In addition to earlier inquiries, a 'Flooding in Leeds' Scrutiny Commission was initiated in August 2005 to investigate flooding and drainage issues in Leeds. WAMWG provided written evidence and verbal updates on its work to the Commission and recently submitted a formal response to the final report.

3.0 Main Issues

- 3.1 WAMWG has made significant progress in implementing most of its original recommendations which aimed to enhance the way in which we maintain our water assets and in which we respond to flooding incidents. The group is currently in the process of revising its terms of reference to ensure its on-going relevance and developing a 'Stage 2 Action Plan' to take its work forward. The following paragraphs provide a status report on the progress made towards their full implementation.

Management Oversight

- 3.2 As senior management's 'drainage champion', the Director of Development continues to meet regularly with WAMWG members to monitor progress, offer support and provide oversight to its activities. The Director also leads in regular senior management discussions with partners in the Environment Agency and Yorkshire Water.
- 3.3 Corporate Management Team continues to take an active interest in this area and received a detailed briefing from the Environment Agency in August on its plans for a £200m flood defence scheme on the River Aire in Leeds. Leader-Management Team has also received this briefing.

Maintenance of Council-owned Watercourses, Lakes and Dams

- 3.4 At the beginning of 2006 Land Drainage contracted a major specialist, Duffy's, to undertake preventative and reactive maintenance work on Council and privately-owned watercourses. All work is commissioned and directed by Land Drainage on the basis of identified priorities and in their view this work has been very successful. Since this work began Leeds has experienced several severe weather events which resulted in a smaller

number of flooded properties relative to that previously experienced and very few problems arising from Council-owned water assets.

- 3.5 Land Drainage also participates in a technical forum of practitioners from the Council, EA and YWS which has been established to discuss detailed issues of mutual concern and this meets regularly.

Risk Assessment

- 3.6 In order to ensure that all significant new developments fully consider flood risks and encompass sustainable drainage funded by developers where possible, Development Department is procuring a comprehensive Flood Risk Management Strategy for the whole Leeds district. The consultants concerned presented its proposals in August and work is aimed for completion in January 2007.

- 3.7 Work is on-going on the major task of identifying and recording the location, ownership and vulnerabilities/risks relating to all watercourses, highway drainage, culverts, lakes and reservoirs across the city. Data collected is being recorded in GIS for use in more effectively responding to flooding, ensuring more effective maintenance prioritisation, and informing the development of capital investment programmes (e.g. Highways Asset Management Plan) and emergency plans, and assessing how assets such as reservoirs and lakes can be better used for recreational purposes.

Emergency Response

- 3.8 The contract with Duffy's procured by Land Drainage for maintaining watercourses also includes provision for call-out by the Peace and Emergency Planning Unit (PEPU) to respond to emergencies on a 24-hour basis (see 3.4 above).

- 3.9 A detailed protocol for more effective multi-agency co-ordination and response to flooding incidents in West Yorkshire was ratified by senior officers of the relevant organisations in December 2005. This clearly sets out the roles and responsibilities for all forms of flooding and the trigger points at which agencies would be expected to respond.

- 3.10 PEPU continues to work with our partner agencies in the Flooding sub-group of the West Yorkshire Resilience Forum (WYRF) to progress several initiatives to benefit communities, including: targeted flood fairs and public information campaigns; proposals for the rapid deployment of resources to mitigate or recover from the effects of flooding; enhanced call-handling of flood-related calls by clearer identification of the sources of flooding and who should be responding; and the sharing of GIS data on the location of each organisation's assets.

Highways and Street Cleansing

- 3.11 Highway Services has identified – together with information provided by Streetscene Services, PEPU and Land Drainage - a range of 'hot spots' for enhanced maintenance work and these locations are now receiving more frequent attention. In addition to this, Streetscene Services has leased two extra vehicles and recruited additional staff to enhance their gully-cleaning arrangements on an on-going basis. These measures also appear to be making a significant contribution to a reduction in the number of flooding incidents.

Wyke Beck

- 3.12 The EA took over responsibility for enforcement on this watercourse in April 2006. Since the May 2005 flooding the agency has built a full hydraulic and hydrological model of the catchment using aerial surveys to map the topography in order to determine what further actions need to be taken. The EA has now received a final report and is determining

whether improvement works are required. Land Drainage has implemented an enhanced inspection regime along the Wyke Beck and installed a trash screen upstream of York Road. WAMWG continues to monitor developments with the EA and is liaising with the EASEL programme to ensure that this links satisfactorily to this work.

Flytipping and Enforcement

- 3.13 The supermarkets have procured the services of a company which has identified and removed shopping trolleys from streets and watercourses across the city. It will now respond to reports of abandoned trolleys on a 24 hour basis through a contact number. As a result, there has been a marked reduction of the number of trolleys found blocking watercourses.

4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

- 4.1 On 17 May Executive Board approved a policy statement drafted by WAMWG on 'Maintaining Water Resources and Responding to Flood Incidents'. This policy clarifies and defines the scope of the Council's roles and responsibilities in terms of statutory duties and permissive powers in relation to maintaining water resources, assessing and mitigating the risks arising, responding to related flooding incidents and supporting the communities affected by these. As such, the policy should help senior officers and members to understand better what the Council should or should not undertake, provide an appropriate profile for water asset management within the Council's portfolio of responsibilities and provide a firmer underpinning for the resourcing of this area. The policy was disseminated to Directors for discussion at their DMTs and publicised as a news item on the intranet. It also forms part of a dedicated WAMWG presence on the intranet in Development's pages.

5.0 Legal And Resource Implications

- 5.1 The new policy has made explicit the range of existing legal implications arising from the Council's ownership of water assets, but most of these were already in existence prior to this initiative. Further responsibilities are likely to arise for the Council in relation to arrangements for large bodies of water as a result of impending guidance for the implementation of the Water Act (2004) which is currently out to consultation. The WAMWG will ensure that these issues are addressed as part of its on-going work and reported back as appropriate.
- 5.2 Additional revenue resources to the tune of £1.1 million per annum have been approved as part of the 2006/7 budget. However, in addition to this, the group's on-going work is likely to give rise to the need for further investment as the implications of its data collection and risk assessment become clearer (e.g. in relation to the Highways Asset Management Plan). This will be reported as this information becomes available.

6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 Overall, the information provided demonstrates that the WAMWG has made excellent progress in both developing appropriate solutions addressing lessons learned, obtaining funding to deliver these and in implementing the recommendations. This work will not be completed overnight and necessitates an on-going, long-term funding commitment and focus from the Council to ensure that it delivers on its statutory, common law and other responsibilities.

7.0 Recommendations

- 7.1 Development Scrutiny Board is requested to note the work and progress of the WAMWG to-date and to support its on-going work.