

**REGENERATION, CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**16 AUGUST 2018**

**MEMBER'S ITEM: FLOODING IN LUTON, CHATHAM**

Report from: Richard Hicks, Director of Regeneration, Culture Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive

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**Summary**

This report sets out a response to an issue, raised by Councillor Osborne, concerning recent surface water flooding in Luton, Chatham

**1. Budget and Policy Framework**

1.1 Under Medway Constitution Overview and Scrutiny rules (Chapter 4, Part 5, Paragraph 9.1) Councillor Osborne has requested that an item on this matter is included on the agenda for this meeting.

**2. The Issue**

2.1. Councillor Osborne has requested that an item be placed on the agenda and that a representative of Southern Water attend the meeting to address the concerns around the recent surface water flooding on Capstone Road which flooded nearby properties and caused major disruption to business and residents.

2.2 Councillor Osborne has requested:

- i) Full publication of the investigation from Southern Water on the cause of the flash flood. This was referred to at the meeting between Council officers and Southern Water on 3 July 2018;
- ii) A briefing on the maintenance of Capstone Road drains by Southern Water; and a report from the Council on maintenance on surface drains including the maintenance cycle undertaken by sub-contractors for Capstone Road, Nelson Terrace, Queens Road and Beacon Hill.

- iii) A briefing on improvements to this site undertaken by Southern Water and how this will mitigate future events.
- iv) A briefing from the Council on disaster preparedness and communication and the level of coordination with external agencies given feedback from residents and councillors.
- v) An update on levels of emergency accommodation provision for residents including the concerns of residents and agencies that engagement has been poor.

### **3 Background**

- 3.1 On 29 May 2018 heavy rainfall caused surface water flooding throughout Medway resulting in flooding to property and highways. The most severe impact was internal flooding of several properties including the Victory Care Home located at Nelson Terrace, Chatham. The properties are a mix of private ownership and Housing Association.
- 3.2 The flooding at Nelson Terrace led to many people being displaced from their homes and caused substantial property damage. According to available information collected by the Council, this area had the most severe impacts; therefore this report focuses on that area specifically.
- 3.3 The area is served by both foul and surface water sewers which are the responsibility of Southern Water. The gullies and pipework which drain the highway are the responsibility of the Council's Highway Service.
- 3.4 Rain water from the road flows off the road surface into gullies (large pots in the ground covered by a metal grid) and through pipes which then connect to the Southern Water surface water sewer.
- 3.5 Assessment of the rainfall at Capstone Road and Nelson Terrace indicates that the rainfall event had a 2.7% chance of happening in any one year. When compared with Environment Agency surface water flood risk mapping, this represents a medium risk event. However, the Council does not have any records of flooding affecting the area prior to 29 May.
- 3.6 A debrief session between Medway Council and Southern Water was held on 3 July following an initial data gathering exercise.

### **4 Council responsibility**

- 4.1 Medway Council is a Lead Local Flood Authority with responsibility for managing local flood risk. Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 allows the Council to carry out formal investigations following flood events, and publish the results of its investigation. An investigation is underway which will be published later in the year.

- 4.2 This technical investigation will identify how the Highways Authority and Southern Water responded to the flooding and what future actions should be considered which are in line with their responsibilities. The information within this report will contribute towards that investigation.
- 4.3 As a Highway Service, the Council also have a function to maintain surface water drains which serve the highway network.

## 5 Highway Maintenance

- 5.1 Highways Annual Maintenance Programme consists of:
- Annually cleaning all gullies which are accessible on residential roads.
  - Twice annually cleaning all gullies which are accessible on the A and B road network.
- 5.2 In 2017, the Highway Service started using an online drainage management system which records the locations of gullies, and the frequency and timing of cleansing. The Service also carries out audit checks to ensure contractor compliance.
- 5.3 Last financial year the Highways Service cleaned 25,391 gullies out of a total Gully Network of 33,867 (75% performance) and by comparison in 2016-17 the Service cleaned 24,949 gullies (74% performance).
- 5.4 Performance is dependent on whether gullies are accessible. Where access is restricted due to a parked vehicle, a visit is made at a later date. If it is not possible to clean the gully on the second visit, this is recorded. However, it is not possible to keep returning to individual gullies due to the number of gullies that require inspection.
- 5.5 Gully cleaning also takes place if a resident reports an issue or if an officer reports a problem following an inspection. Inspections occur a minimum of once per year. Larger roads are inspected more frequently, for example Capstone Road is inspected monthly.
- 5.6 The figures below outline the gully cleansing undertaken in Luton so far for 2018. Where gullies have not been cleaned is indicative of where parked vehicles have prevented access.

| Location       | Date of visit | Gullies cleaned |
|----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Capstone Road  | 1 Feb 2018    | 5 of 12         |
|                | 1 July 2018   | 12 of 12        |
| Nelson Terrace | 27 Feb 2018   | 0 of 4          |
| Queens Road    | 27 Feb 2018   | 0 of 7          |
| Beacon Hill    | 6/7 Mar 2018  | 15 of 22        |

- 5.7 In addition to the above cleansing visits, Highways Inspectors inspected Nelson Terrace, Queens Road, Beacon Hill and Capstone Road on 17 April 2018. No defects were found in the gullies at this time and there was no significant observation of sedimentation or leaf collection that would impede water discharging through the gully system. Further inspections were carried out following the flooding event of 29 May and again no defects were found during these inspections.
- 5.8 The Highways Service have trialled road closures to access gullies which have previously been inaccessible, however these are complex and costly to arrange. Current budgets do not allow the Council to carry out this type of work. However within roads where there are blocked gullies and flooding concerns in areas of high risk, budgets are prioritised so that the gullies are cleaned.

## **6 Southern Water Maintenance**

- 6.1 Southern Water surface water sewers are designed to take an amount of rainfall associated with rainfall events which have a 3.3% chance of occurrence in any year, which are small, regular rainfall events. Their asset maintenance and investment policy is risk based meaning that maintenance is targeted to areas which experience regular surface water flooding. The event which occurred within Medway on 29 May had a 2.7% chance of happening in any year, which represents a larger rainfall event.
- 6.2 Most sewers are designed to be self cleansing, achieved by the speed at which water flows through the them and Southern Water report there have not been any reports of flooding or blockages in Capstone Road that would identify a need for cleaning.
- 6.3 Following the event on 29 May, Southern Water surveyed several parts of the sewer to ensure that there was no damage or blockage. The results of these surveys were shared with Medway Council Highways Service.
- 6.4 The survey showed that one length of surface water sewer and foul sewer required cleaning to remove debris and complete the survey. This was carried out and included cleaning of surface and foul water sewers near Capstone Road to allow further survey.
- 6.5 The survey identified the need for a lining repair to part of the sewer. This requires sensitive traffic management and the preparation of a repair plan is underway. There are also a number of less serious defects that have been included in the programme for future improvement works.
- 6.6 It is unclear whether the debris had built up before the storm or had been flushed down during the storm; however it is not believed that this caused or contributed to the flooding. It is concluded that the flood event was a result of sewer overloading and overland surface water flow.

6.7 Based on this, whilst Southern Water recognise the impacts of the flooding in the area were unfortunate, based on the current information available, the prospects for investment to upgrade the network in the near to medium term are low.

## **7 Disaster preparedness, coordination and communication**

7.1 Medway Council responds to emergencies in line with the Medway Council Major Emergency Plan which triggers a response at number of internal levels.

7.2 On 28 May 2018, the Met Office issued a 'Yellow Rain Warning' which is equal to a 'low likelihood of medium impacts' across Kent. On receipt of this warning, Council Officers observed areas that tend to react to heavy rainfall using the Medway Control Centre and Traffic Operations Room.

7.3 After a number of reports of flooding, including that at Nelson Terrace, the incident was escalated. An officer visited Nelson Terrace to establish the extent and impact of flooding and Strood Leisure Centre was put on standby to receive emergency evacuees. At this point, the Emergency Services were managing the flood.

7.4 A meeting was held at 1500hrs after an initial data collection exercise and Council Officers were sent to all areas where flooding had been reported, including Nelson Terrace. Officers confirmed that there were no reports of residents having nowhere to go at any of the areas reported and that all those affected at Nelson Terrace had either been rehoused/placed in emergency accommodation or were staying with relatives.

7.5 The Council also contacted the two Housing Associations at Nelson Terrace to see if assistance or engagement with residents was required; both providers confirmed that they did not require any Local Authority support.

7.6 On 29 May 18 there was a Recovery meeting which prompted a Community Impact Assessment. This was a further data gathering exercise to find out more about the flooding and to ensure that all residents had successfully found alternative accommodation. This assessment included engagement with residents at Nelson Terrace who were available at the time of visit.

## **8 Risk Management**

8.1 No Risk Management issues identified as a decision has not been requested and the paper is for information and discussion only.

## **9 Finance and Legal Implications**

9.1 The finance and legal implications are set out throughout the report.

## **10 Recommendations**

10.1 That Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the roles and responsibilities in relation to the flooding event on 29 May, in terms of:

- The Council's role and responsibility as a Lead Local Flood Authority and a Highways Authority.
- The Council's role from an Emergency Planning perspective.
- The role and responsibility of Southern Water as a Water and Sewerage Company.

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### **Appendices**

None

### **Background Papers**

None