



Environment and Transport Select Committee
24 April 2014

Flooding Update

Purpose of the report: Scrutiny of Services

To provide an update on the major flooding that has affected the County and provide information on recovery work going forward.

Introduction:

1. In December 2013 the County of Surrey was hit by extreme weather conditions resulting in a prolonged spell of flooding affecting several district and boroughs.
2. Surrey declared major incidents on 24 December 2013 and 9 February 2014 to coordinate the response to flooding across the County.
3. A coordinated multi agency response was implemented involving officers from the Environment Agency (EA), District and Borough Councils, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Surrey Police, Surrey Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), Her Majesty's Armed Forces, Surrey County Council (SCC), various utility companies including Thames Water and Public Health England (PHE).
4. This report provides background information on the incident and the move towards recovery and restoring affected communities to ensure that they are more resilient going forward.

Summary of the incident

5. On 21 December 2013 forecast reports were received of potential strong winds and heavy rain raising the potential for wide area flooding on the tributaries of the River Mole and River Wey.
6. Flood warnings were issued for the stretches of the River Mole at Dorking through to Leatherhead and the entire length of the River Wey on 23 December 2013. Warnings were also issued for other areas such

as the Gatwick and Burstow streams. These are issued when it is expected that properties will flood.

7. On 24 December 2013, a major incident was declared when a severe flood warning was issued for the River Mole at Leatherhead and Fetcham. During this period partnership coordination at both a strategic and tactical level was implemented (as per the agreed response arrangements).
8. In reaction to the rainfall across the County, on 3 January, water levels on the River Thames rose and flood warnings were issued for communities on Surrey stretches. Through partnership coordination isolated evacuations were undertaken for communities at risk. Sewage systems were also impacted due to high river levels.
9. The majority of flood warnings were removed by mid January but the County continued to experience higher than average rainfall.
10. On 6 February, the National Flood Forecasting Centre warned that further property flooding was likely across Surrey and flood warnings were issued for areas along the River Thames.
11. Rising river levels resulted in 9 severe flood warnings being issued on 9 February due to the risk to life. A major incident was declared with strategic coordination at Mount Browne, the Surrey Police Headquarters. At this time, due to the expected impact on residents and partner resources, a request was made for military support.
12. The severe flood warnings remained in place until 17 February and during this time the resources and arrangements to support this major incident were maintained.
13. Following the removal of the severe flood warnings the declaration of major incident was removed and a phased handover to recovery was undertaken.

Recovery and next steps

14. On Friday 21 February official sign over into recovery stage from Surrey Police to Surrey County Council took place. The incident room at Mount Browne was closed down and the County Emergency Centre at County Hall deemed operational from Saturday 22 February to deal with recovery activity.
15. A Recovery Plan has been implemented and work has begun to restore the affected communities. The recovery is being managed through a programme of workstreams. These include:
 - **Environment**, including waste collection, skips and sandbag removal.
 - **Infrastructure**, opening and repairing council buildings and roads.
 - **Humanitarian**, establishing Flood Recovery Centres, dealing with sanitation and safeguarding issues.

- **Communities and mutual aid**, working with partners and voluntary agencies.
 - **Communications and engagement**, ensuring adequate information is provided.
 - **Economic**, assessing the insurance and business impact.
 - **Resources**, collective assessment and coordination of resources and funding.
16. A Recovery Coordination Group was established to oversee the recovery programme and ensure that communities and District and Borough councils receive the support that they need. This group consists of representatives from all those who had been involved in the response to this incident. It is chaired by the Assistant Chief Executive of Surrey County Council and met daily for the first 2 weeks of the recovery programme. Meeting frequency has now reduced and the group met on 10 April to look at the medium to long term recovery plan.

Conclusions:

17. The EA have confirmed that the incident on the Lower Thames is the worst flooding that has occurred in Surrey since 1947. It is recognised that this is the second occurrence within a year where residents in these areas have experienced flood conditions. This particular incident has resulted in around 2000 properties being reported to have internal flooding, however this data is still being qualified (see annex A).
18. During the response phase and going into recovery, partners from across Surrey along with colleagues from the Military and voluntary sector worked together to support the needs of residents affected by flooding.
19. The County Council and partner agencies are now working to identify lessons learnt through a formal debrief process.

Recommendations:

20. It is recommended that the Committee:
- a) Notes the multi-agency response to the flooding event
 - b) Establishes a flooding task group to look at this incident in detail

Next steps:

- Formal debriefs will take place with both internally within Surrey County Council and with partners throughout April 2014 to review the response and look at lessons learnt from the flooding incident.
- An Environment Agency and Met Office detailed report on the incident will be drafted and published by the end of May 2014.
- There is ongoing work through the Flood Risk Partnership to look at flood defences going forward.
- A Surrey County Council investigation into specific occurrences of flooding is currently taking place.

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Sources/background papers: Surrey Local Resilience Forum, Common Recognised Information Picture (CRIP), Recovery Coordination Group meeting minutes and papers.