



**AGENDA ITEM 11**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**  
**17 NOVEMBER 2009**  
**FLOOD PREVENTION – REPORT OF ENVIRONMENT**  
**SCRUTINY PANEL**

**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To inform the Overview and Scrutiny Board (OSB) of the Environment Scrutiny Panel's findings following its decision to examine flood prevention arrangements in Middlesbrough.

**RECOMMENDATION**

2. That the OSB considers the Environment Scrutiny Panel's findings and recommendations.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

3. On 6 October 2009 the Environment Scrutiny Panel agreed a request from a non-Executive Member to examine flood prevention arrangements in Middlesbrough. This request is set out below:

*The Overview and Scrutiny Board established a Flooding and Flood Prevention Working Group that produced a report which was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Board in 2002. The report clearly referenced the issue of sandbags and proposed that the Authority reviewed its current sandbag policy with the emphasis to provide access to sandbags for all residents of Middlesbrough during localised flooding.*

*(Cont....)*

*Recognising that problems associated with flooding are becoming an issue to the region, it is requested that the Environment Scrutiny Panel ask for an update on the sandbag policy, what changes were introduced following the 2002 report and whether the service is ready to deliver the sandbag policy as we enter the winter and potentially the higher risk seasons.*

4. By way of background information, the recommendations made by the relevant scrutiny body (the Flooding and Flood Prevention Working Group ) in 2002, as referenced above, are shown at **Appendix 1**.
5. Although the Member's request focused on the Council's sandbags policy, the scrutiny panel agreed that a general update on the authority's involvement in flood prevention should be sought. This was to include the position in respect of any sandbags policy. Accordingly, on 30 October 2009, officers from the Council's Transport and Design service, who are responsible for flood-prevention issues, attended the Environment Scrutiny panel meeting to discuss this issue. A detailed series of reports, policy documents and information leaflets, in relation to the matter, were considered by the panel.

### **The Scrutiny Panel's Findings**

6. The Scrutiny Panel's main findings in respect of this topic are set out below:
7. National interest in this topic increased with the extensive UK flooding that occurred in 2007. This resulted in the Government commissioning a report (known as the 'Pitt Report') - "Learning Lessons from the 2007 Floods" - which included 92 recommendations for implementation by relevant agencies, such as local authorities, the Environment Agency and bodies such as Northumbrian Water. One recommendation relates to the requirement for local flood prevention arrangements to be considered annually by the scrutiny process and this will be carried out in Middlesbrough through the Environment Scrutiny Panel.
8. Discussions have been undertaken with the Environment Agency and emergency services as to how to address the requirements of the Pitt report. There is now an emphasis on a pro-active flood-prevention approach rather than the historical, reactive, approach of addressing flooding problems as they arise. Notwithstanding the fact that sandbags are generally used as a last resort and offer minimal protection and defence, the panel was advised that their use (and therefore any sandbags policy) is only a very small element of the overall approach to flood management and flood-risk management. However, in order to provide a consistent approach across area boundaries, a joint sandbags policy for the Tees Valley area is currently in the process of being developed with neighbouring authorities. Sandbags will not be delivered to individual households but will be strategically deployed by local authorities - for example to protect a whole section of houses or part of a street. No resources will be available for the wholesale provision of sandbags to individual properties.
9. The key elements which the draft policy highlights are as follows:
  - The primary responsibility for protecting property from flooding and flooding risk rests with the property owner, who should have in place their own flood protection plan.
  - The Environment Agency has undertaken considerable work to identify and highlight areas of identified flood risk. People in such areas should follow Environment Agency Advice.

- The local authorities are concerned that, in the event of major flood risk to a large number of properties, they will not have the resources to protect every property. This could lead to flooding of some properties that - with some preventative measures undertaken by the occupant - could have been avoided.
- Local authorities do not maintain large stockpiles of sandbags for the protection of private residences. This is because:
  - they have a limited shelf life
  - they cannot be transported and deployed quickly enough to be effective
  - resources can be better used to collectively protect communities

10. A further issue which was highlighted in the scrutiny panel's discussions was in relation to Erimus Housing properties. It is understood that Erimus - as a property owner - has its own policy on sandbags and may supply these to tenants. Essentially, the organisation's relationship with tenants is entirely different to Middlesbrough Council's relationship with individual occupiers of privately owned dwellings.

11. Having considered the submitted information, the scrutiny panel wishes to highlight the following findings and recommendations for consideration by the OSB and Executive:

- (a). The position has changed since the recommendations that were made in respect of the 2002 scrutiny review of flooding - there is now a more pro-active approach to flood prevention rather than a reactive approach to flooding.
- (b). The draft sandbags policy submitted to the scrutiny panel is supported and endorsed - although it is recognised that the use of sandbags, and the policy, is a small element of flood prevention work .
- (c). The new local authority duty to report annually to scrutiny on local flood prevention arrangements is welcomed.
- (d). There is a need to continue to publicise the need for individual householders to take responsibility for their own flood prevention arrangements and to highlight areas at risk of flooding. Existing publicity leaflets should be amended to reflect the updated position, the responsibilities of householders and the sandbags policy, once this is approved.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM 2002 FLOODING AND FLOOD PREVENTION  
WORKING GROUP**

(All recommendations apart from (n) were approved by the Executive)

That the Working Group of the Overview and Scrutiny Board recommends to the Executive:

- (a) That thanks be noted for the hard work and dedication of the staff involved in the recent localised flooding incidents in Middlesbrough;
- (b) That the Authority review its current flooding policies with particular focus on the following issues:-
  - (i) That a list of vulnerable people in particular the elderly and housebound in flood-prone areas should be compiled for evacuation purposes during flooding incidents;
  - (ii) That becks and watercourses that effect Middlesbrough are maintained along their whole course to ensure that problems do not arise downstream during extreme weather events;
  - (iii) The policy on the distribution of sandbags for both Council tenants and private residents during localised flooding events;
  - (iv) The current regime for gully emptying in order that they can operate to their maximum capacity during localised flooding events;
  - (v) The protocol with the Police with regard to the closure of roads affected by highway flooding;
  - (vi) 'Post Flood Clean-up' to ensure residents understand what support the Authority will give in the event of flooding incidents, particularly sewer flooding of homes;
- (c) That the Authority and other relevant agencies produce a Joint Flooding Policy for Middlesbrough;
- (d) That the Authority support the response of Water Voice Northumbria to the OFWAT consultation document 'Flooding from Sewers – A Way Forward' (March 2002). This would enable Northumbrian Water to invest more heavily in improving their piped sewage network, decreasing the risk of sewer flooding to domestic and commercial premises;

- (e) That the Authority should lobby Northumbrian Water to ensure that detailed attention is given to each and every complaint of sewer flooding in the town. The Working Group has been disappointed by the level of co-ordination between the two authorities and would like to see this significantly improved in the future;
- (f) That consideration should be given to the Authority establishing a formal liaison group with Northumbrian Water to ensure Elected Members remain able to continue to press for investment within the Town;
- (g) That the Executive commission a report detailing the proposed engineering solutions together with a prioritisation scheme of works to the geographical issues as outlined in Section 9 of this report. This report should also complement the report shortly to be produced by ENTEC Consultants;
- (h) That the Executive consider the need of a bid being made to the Capital Programme for the works referred to in paragraph (g) above;
- (i) That the Authority continue to pursue Northumbrian Water for the infrastructure improvements that are required to bring the sewage system of Middlesbrough up to acceptable standards;
- (j) That the Executive investigate the human resource capacity with regard to localised flooding events to ensure that the present policy of contact arrangements are robust and are capable of meeting the extra capacity necessary in extreme events;
- (k) That the Authority's web-site be enhanced in order to provide information to residents on flooding and advice on what action may be taken in the event of an incident in Middlesbrough;
- (l) That a leaflet be produced which details relevant contact details of both Middlesbrough Council and other relevant agencies in the event of flooding and other emergencies for the residents of Middlesbrough;
- (m) That local supermarkets should be lobbied to act more responsible with regard to shopping trolleys as shopping trolleys are one of the main causes of becks becoming blocked. The Authority should applaud a recent move by Sainsburys which has led to a situation where 300 to 400 trolleys per year being stolen has been reduced to only a handful per month going missing;
- (n) That the Authority should consider establishing a Distress Relief Fund for vulnerable families to help with preventative measures and post flood clean ups; and
- (o) That the Authority investigates the provision of an optional insurance scheme as part of Council tenancy agreements that covers flood damage. This additional cost should be borne by the tenant.