

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 4th March 2014 at Pippbrook, Dorking from 7.00pm to 10.12pm

Present: Councillors Stephen Cooksey (Chairman), Margaret Cooksey (substitute for Dave Howarth), Rosemary Dickson (substitute for Lynne Brooks), Paula Hancock, Chris Hunt, Roger Hurst, Paul Newman and Paul Potter

Also present: Councillors Emile Aboud, Valerie Homewood, Simon Ling, John Northcott, David Preedy, Caroline Salmon, David Sharland, Philippa Shimmin and Chris Townsend

Surrey County Councillors: Tim Hall and Hazel Watson

72. Minutes

The minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 28th January 2014 were approved as a correct record.

73. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lynne Brooks, Clare Curran, Raj Haque, Phil Harris, Dave Howarth and Paul Newman

74. Flooding Review

Following the recent severe weather and incidents of flooding at various locations in the District, the Committee received two presentations, one from the Council's Strategic Leadership Manager, Graeme Kane, on the Council's response to the floods and the other from the Environment Agency on their work during the same period. Ms Sarah Smith and Mr Nigel Philpott were in attendance at the meeting on behalf of the Environment Agency.

During the course of these presentations the following points were noted:-

- The Council's main responsibilities during incidents of flooding were to identify and analyse the risks set out in the Multi Agency Flood Plan, have the Council's own response planned through the Emergency Plan and Business Continuity Plan, the dissemination of information to the public and also a number of duties in the recovery period following an incident related to normal Council functions such as Environmental Health and Building Control. In addition the Council also maintains a supply of sandbags which are available to the public throughout the year.
- As part of a coordinated response to the floods the Council worked with other partner agencies as a member of the Surrey Local Resilience Forum. Members of this forum included the Police, all local authorities within Surrey, the Fire and Rescue Service, NHS, Armed Forces, Highways Agency and the Environment Agency.
- Mole Valley was worst affected by flooding on 24th December 2013. Since that time there had been a number of flood warnings put in place by the Environment Agency, but the number of properties affected had been lower than during the incident on Christmas Eve.
- The Council was compiling information on those properties that had received flood damage over the past couple of months and Members were advised that any information they could provide on their local areas would be welcomed. Any information gathered would be entered into the Council's GIS mapping software to help gain an understanding of the flooding issues and to help plan preventative measures for any future flooding incidents. Information on specific properties would not be shared with other agencies.
- During the recent flooding the Council had acted as a source of information for the public by providing regular updates through the Council website, Facebook, Twitter and also Customer Services.

- The Council had also provided 11,400 sandbags since December for members of the public to use to protect their properties from flood water. These had been available for collection at the Depot and at other locations in the District. Individual deliveries were also organised for those elderly and infirm residents who were not able to collect the sandbags themselves.
- The Council had a statutory requirement to provide information on vulnerable people living in the District during an emergency situation. This information was compiled from the Council's existing databases and provided to Surrey County Council in a secure format. This information was then used by the County Council to prioritise the coordinated response to an emergency depending on those residents with the most need.
- On 24th December 2013 the Council established a rest centre at the Fairfield Centre for those residents and other people in the local area who had been affected by the flooding. A total of 12 people visited the centre and it was stood down by the evening of 24th December.
- Throughout the period the Council has deployed Incident Liaison Officers (ILOs) to areas of flooding to gain an up to date assessment of the situation. The ILOs were also used to check the safety and provide reassurance to local residents.
- As part of a mutual aid agreement with other local authorities the Council had provided Spelthorne and Elmbridge Borough Council's with additional sandbags and a bagging machine to Elmbridge. Officer support had also been given to Spelthorne to help them with their Council Tax billing. The Council had also allowed Surrey Fire and Rescue to temporarily relocate to Park House after the Fire Station in Leatherhead was flooded.
- There was a Surrey-wide strategic Recovery Plan being used to guide the recovery following the flooding incidents. As part of this plan, officers of Mole Valley District Council were working to aid the recovery within the District. This work included arranging for the National Flood Forum trailer to visit affected areas, providing advice to residents and putting processes in place to administer the various funding streams being offered by the Government.
- The Council had made a claim of approximately £100,000 from the Government's Severe Weather Recovery Scheme in order to recoup some of the costs incurred throughout the flooding.
- The Environment Agency (EA) records showed that 56% of the average annual rainfall fell in a 66 day period between mid December and mid February. On 23rd and 24th December there was 76.2mm of rainfall, which was above the average total for the whole of December.
- EA used three categories to inform the public about potential flooding. The three categories were:-
 - Flood Alert – which was an early precaution to advise that flooding was possible.
 - Flood Warning – which was used when flooding was expected and individuals should take steps to protect themselves and their property.
 - Severe Flood Warning – this was used when there was a possible risk to life from flooding.
- It was confirmed that Flood Alerts and Warnings had been in place along the River Mole for much of December, January and February and a Severe Flood Warning had been issued for the Leatherhead section of the River Mole on 23rd December 2013.
- Following on from the flooding, the EA would be using the data they had gathered to inform future flood prevention work. EA had also submitted an application for funding to carry out modelling work along the River Mole to identify potential flood alleviation schemes. Any schemes identified would be subject to funding and it may be that EA will look for contributions from local businesses that would benefit from the proposed flood alleviation works.

- The main roles and responsibilities of EA were to provide a strategic overview of sources of flood risk, emergency planning and permissive powers to carry out work on rivers.

During the course of the presentation, the EA addressed rumours that the flooding along the Upper Mole had been exacerbated by flood prevention measures at Gatwick Airport and by the flood alleviation scheme for the Lower Mole at Chertsey. It was confirmed that neither of these areas had any impact on the flooding along the Upper Mole and it had in fact been caused by the sheer volume of rainfall over a short period of time.

A number of Councillors were concerned about surface water flooding and the on-going maintenance of ditches. It was confirmed that the EA were specifically responsible for river water flooding and surface water flooding was within the remit of either Surrey County Council or the landowners. However the EA did confirm that they would be looking to work with other agencies to address future issues.

In response to specific issues relating to Brockham and Strood Green it was confirmed that a local Flood Forum was being established for the area and that the EA would work with this group to identify and resolve flooding issues in the area. It was noted that some Members were concerned about the lack of funding that would be made available to address any issues highlighted by the Flood Forum.

There was also concern that EA only provided planning advice on major developments and if there were a number of smaller developments in one area they could have a similar impact as one large development. It was acknowledged that there may be an impact from a cumulative amount of small developments, but EA did not have sufficient resources to be able comment on every planning application.

In response to a question about who was responsible for dredging the Pippbrook, it was advised that it was the responsibility of landowners to maintain the beds and banks of any water course through their property. The EA did carry out checks of river beds and banks, but they sometimes experienced difficulties accessing properties. Although EA had enforcement powers to ensure land owners maintained water courses through their property, these were usually used as a last resort.

The Chairman thanked Mr Kane, Ms Smith and Mr Philpott for their presentations. It was also advised that it was expected that there would be a further flooding report brought before the Scrutiny Committee later in the year and the EA would be invited to attend to this meeting.

75. Community Safety Partnership

The Committee received a presentation from the Council's Partnerships and Development Manager, Patrick McCord and Neighbourhood Inspector Andy Rundle about the work of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) in Mole Valley.

During the course of the presentation, the following points were noted:-

- The purpose of the CSP was to reduce negative behaviour and promote community safety in the local area. The six statutory partners involved in the CSP were Mole Valley District Council, Surrey County Council, Surrey Police, Surrey Fire and Rescue, Surrey & Sussex Probation Service, South Downs Clinical Commissioning Group. Other groups such as Circle Housing and some voluntary and faith groups were also involved.
- One area targeted by the CSP this year had been anti-social behaviour on Fairs Road in Leatherhead. As part of this work the CSP organised a litter pick which included the participation of 60 local residents.
- The CSP also funded a Drugs Outreach Worker to work with individuals with drug related issues, who were having a negative impact on their local communities.
- Domestic abuse was a priority for the CSP with support and funding provided to East Surrey Domestic Abuse Service.
- The CSP had also funded off road motorbikes for the Police to help combat rural crime.

- Crime in Mole Valley had fallen by 10% in the past year, which was equivalent to 260 less reported crimes. Currently 30.6% of reported crime in the district was resolved, this compared favourably to 26% national average.
- Although there had been a reduction in most types of crime, there had been an increase in accidents involving bicycles which could be linked to the increased popularity of cycling in the district following the Olympics.
- Cannabis farming was on the radar of the local police in the district and in the past month there had been a significant seizure, but it was not considered to be a big problem.

Members agreed that the police operating in the rural area's of the district were providing a valuable service and were relieved to be advised that there were no plans at present to transfer funding for these officers to other areas.

The Chairman thanked Mr McCord and Inspector Rundle for their presentation and noted that it would be useful to find a mechanism for feeding back information to Member's on the activities of the CSP throughout the year. It was agreed that this would be investigated.

Resolved: That comments of the Committee be reported to the Executive during their consideration of this item.

76. Community Support Services

The Committee received a presentation from the Community Support Manager, Tim Ward, who provided an overview of his Service.

During the course of the presentation, the following points were noted:-

- There were 32.3 fte staff employed within the Service, this included the staff providing the Community Alarm service which operated 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- The Community Transport service, which included Dial-a-Ride, had undertaken 37,000 journeys in the past year including approximately 12,000 school run journeys. At present the school run service covered pupils going to the Ashcombe, Priory and West Hill schools.
- The Handyman service was operated in conjunction with Independent Homes Solutions and was available for residents who were over 60, disabled or not able to carry out the work themselves. The services offered included minor electrical and plumbing work, which were offered at low rates.
- The Fairfield Centre in Leatherhead was in the process of becoming a Wellbeing Centre offering a range of services to elderly residents. In the past year there had been 34,000 visitors to the centre. Officers also had regular meetings with the Dorking Christian Centre to monitor the service being provided.
- The Community Alarm service currently had 2710 clients within the Mole Valley and Reigate and Banstead area. In total it provided telecare facilities for 7 of the 11 local authorities in Surrey as well as for Housing Associations and sheltered housing schemes outside of Surrey. In the past year the team had answered 371,792 calls.

It was questioned how the Community Alarm service would be provided in the event that there was problems with customers telephone line. It was advised that in these circumstances a mobile phone would be provided as a temporary measure.

The Chairman thanked Mr Ward for his presentation.

77. Amendment to the Terms of Reference of the Highways Delegation Scrutiny Panel

The Chairman advised the Committee that the Highways Delegation Scrutiny Panel was requesting an amendment to its terms of reference to allow it to follow the tender process for the new Highways Horticultural Maintenance contract.

Resolved: That the revised terms of references for the Highways Delegation Scrutiny Panel be approved.

78. Scrutiny Work Programme 2013-2014

It was confirmed reports from the Car Parking Scrutiny Panel and the Waste Management Scrutiny Panel would be included on the next agenda of the Scrutiny Committee.

Resolved: That the Work Programme be noted.