



Ryedale District Council

REPORT TO: Policy and Resources Committee

DATE: 14 February 2008

REPORTING OFFICER: Performance Manager
Phil Hancock

SUBJECT: Response to the Interim report of the Pitt Review

WARDS AFFECTED: All

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider a response from the Council to the Interim report of the Pitt Review of the summer floods and for this Council to include within its response the Land Drainage Liaison Group's views

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- a. To endorse the response of the Council to the Interim report on the Pitt Review as set out below;
- b. To endorse the response of the Land Drainage Liaison Group and to include this as part of the overall response of the Council;
- c. That the Final Report of the Pitt Review be reported to this Committee at a later date

3.0 REASONS SUPPORTING DECISION

Pickering and other settlements in the district were flooded over the summer. It is to be expected that further flooding incidents will continue to occur. It is appropriate that this Council takes an interest in and should attempt to influence the conclusions and recommendations that arise from the Pitt Review.

Following a Scrutiny Review of Agricultural Land Drainage the Council promoted the formation of a Land Drainage Liaison Group whose purpose is:

'To make recommendations to promote sustainable land drainage for the benefit of the people of Ryedale, local businesses and the natural environment. This to be achieved through action, jointly or separately,

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to alleviate flooding, improve river maintenance, and to seek joint funding for this purpose’.

The Land Drainage Liaison Group have asked that their views on the Pitt Review be made known to and endorsed by the Council and be included with the Council’s own response to the Review.

4.0 REPORT

Sir Michael Pitt was asked by ministers to carry out a review of the flood-related emergencies that occurred during the summer of 2007. The summer flood events were largely the result of drains and sewers being unable to cope with sudden and extreme rainfall, unlike the flooding from rivers that Ryedale has suffered over the years.

An interim report ‘Learning lessons from the 2007 floods’ was published in December 2007. The full report can be accessed at:

http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/thepittreview/interim_report.aspx

A copy of the full report is also available in the Members Lounge. As the report is 165 pages in length no attempt has been made to summarise it here. However, a summary produced by the Review Team as part of the Interim Report is attached at Annex A.

The report contains 15 recommendations for urgent action to prevent or mitigate flooding and a further 72 interim conclusions that await further information and evidence prior to adoption as firm recommendations in the Final Report. These are also included within Annex A. The Secretary of State for the Environment, Hilary Benn, has accepted the urgent recommendations in the Report. The Review will be looking at the costs, benefits and feasibility of the interim conclusions before making its final report.

Many of the recommendations and interim conclusions relate to the Environment Agency and to Local Resilience Forums. However, there is a general expression for a more strategic leadership role for local authorities (IC 17, 18, 26, 38, 60, 70) as well as many detailed conclusions that will have implications for Councils (IC 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 21, 66, 68). Clearly, these have potential resource implications for councils and for way in which councils and local agencies work together.

The deadline for comments and further evidence to the Pitt review is 31 March 2008. A final report will be published this summer.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The following is a summary of various points concerning the interim report:

- The current interim conclusions, if made recommendations, have significant resource implications for councils in meeting the expectations of both the Government and the local community. The Government needs to ensure that both sufficient resources and powers are available to councils for them to translate any further recommendations arising from the review into reality. In referring to councils it is unclear if the review means only unitary and county authorities rather than districts and clarification is requested on this;

The Land Drainage Liaison Group met on Monday 4 February and the response to the Pitt Review is summarised below:

- whilst dialogue between the Environment Agency and landowners is welcomed this is no substitute for direct action to address longstanding issues of local concern;
- in principle it is unacceptable that maintenance of main rivers is reduced, drains blocked up, flood defences removed or abandoned, or river meanders re-created;
- full and detailed consultation by the Environment Agency with landowners must take place before any changes are put in place and appropriate compensation must be agreed;
- thousands of pounds of damage to crops was caused by the summer floods in Ryedale and the impact of this upon farm incomes and food prices and ultimately on both the consumer and the local rural economy should be properly valued;
- the Review fails to acknowledge the long term importance of protecting and not abandoning good quality agricultural land to floodwater.

Councillor Keal submitted additional comments to the Land drainage liaison group that are summarised here:

- The Pitt Review fails to tackle the central issue. It is not about the response to floods but the need to provide adequate protection to communities. Pickering has suffered six floods in eight years. However, prepared someone is for flooding when their home or business is inundated then their lives are disrupted for many months and even years. The flood damage in Pickering this summer has cost £3.5m whilst a scheme, already designed for the town, would cost only £6.7m to implement. A sum of £1m has been offered by this Council to support a flood defence scheme in the town.
- As acknowledged by the National Audit Office's recent report, the Environment Agency's approach to prioritising flood defence schemes places smaller rural communities at a disadvantage to urban areas and this is unacceptable.

- The report aims to look at the best way to adapt to changes in the intensity of rainfall. However, it scapegoats people who have been flooded by urging them to be better prepared. The Review thereby sidesteps the failure to invest in protecting our communities;

Members are asked to endorse the response and to include it with the Council's overall response.

Background Papers:

OFFICER CONTACT:

Please contact Phil Hancock, Performance Manager if you require any further information on the contents of this report. The officer can be contacted at Ryedale House, 01653 600666 Extension 296 and e-mail phil.hancock@ryedale.gov.uk.

Annex A Executive Summary from the Interim report

Background

During August 2007, Sir Michael Pitt was asked by ministers to carry out a review of the flood-related emergencies which occurred during the summer of 2007. This is the interim report of the Review. It is being published now to achieve three objectives:

- to identify issues which need urgent action;
- to set out the direction for the remainder of the Review; and
- to provide a document for consultation before the final report is published next summer.

The floods during June and July 2007 were a wake-up call. The three months from May to July were the wettest since records began and the events that followed have been linked to the deaths of 13 people. They also resulted in damage to approximately 48,000 homes and 7,000 businesses. Power and water supplies were lost, railway lines, eight motorways and many other roads were closed and large parts of five counties and four cities were brought to a standstill. From an emergency response standpoint, this was a new level of challenge. The flooding triggered a series of emergencies which stretched local resources to the limit.

Conversations with victims illustrated the scale of distress and human misery experienced by many people. Even considering the extraordinary degree of disruption caused by the floods, the country was fortunate that the impact was not much more severe. There were several near disasters of an even greater magnitude. While the scale of loss and damage was massive, the crisis would have been worse had it not been for the dedication, quick thinking and effective action of those involved in the rescue and recovery operation.

Flood risk is here to stay. The Review recognises the findings of other reports, such as Stern and Foresight, which predict climatic change and state that this country can expect more extreme weather, with periods of intensive rainfall. The Review proposes that the country should confront these mounting challenges and adapt accordingly, recognizing that this process of adaptation will take place over a generation. The impact of the floods and the high level of risk involved could have been significantly reduced with stronger local leadership of flood risk management, clarification of roles, more effective cooperation between responsible organisations, better protection of infrastructure and wider and deeper public engagement.

Given the severity of the emergencies this summer and the risks we face in future, the over-riding purpose of the Pitt Review is to learn lessons from the floods of 2007 and to bring forward recommendations that will help the country adapt and deal more effectively with future flooding incidents.

The findings

The Report contains a total of 15 recommendations and 72 interim conclusions. They are strategic in nature but with implications for every locality in the country. The Report also considers one or two of the 'myths' surrounding flooding. These include strongly held views about standards of waterway maintenance and the belief that some communities were deliberately allowed to flood to reduce the impact on places further downstream.

Chapters 1 and 2 provide the context for the Review, describing the severity of the emergencies and their wider social and economic impacts. They summarise the events of June and July and the effects the floods had on individuals, their families, businesses and communities. They are drawn from social research commissioned specifically for the Review, published in full as a supporting document to this Interim Report.

Climate change and the risk of flooding are discussed in **Chapter 3**. Ideally, experts would be able to accurately forecast bad weather and predict well in advance which properties will flood even more effectively than they already do. Doing so would give the emergency services and others more time to respond and to make the right decisions in a crisis. In practice the distribution, timing and intensity of rainfall and the dynamics of water flow once rain hits the ground are notoriously complex to model. Also, the nature of flooding is changing. In the past, considerable attention has been paid to the risks of coastal and river flooding. However, the greater intensity of rainfall and increasing urbanisation are leading to more flash floods caused by water running off the surface of the land. River, surface water and groundwater flooding all took place this summer, adding to the complications.

During the emergencies, the Met Office and the Environment Agency worked well together, but the limitations of some existing processes, together with technical limitations of flood prediction, meant that many property owners received warnings after their property had already flooded or not at all. Research into flood prediction is advancing and we believe this should be a priority subject to feasibility and cost effectiveness. Rapid progress must be made over the next few years to ensure that flood risk planning and management, including public warnings and emergency response, is underpinned by an improved understanding of when and where flooding will occur.

There are obvious concerns about the large number of properties currently at risk of flooding and the likelihood of further significant development in flood risk areas. **Chapter 4** discusses the need to strengthen and enforce the provisions of PPS 25 and Building Regulations to ensure that flood resistance and resilience measures are fully built into all new development where necessary.

The law relating to drainage systems is complex and numerous bodies are involved including the Environment Agency, water companies, local authorities, internal drainage boards and private owners. It is not surprising that the public are confused and that they wonder who is accountable. There is room for improved inter-agency cooperation. This Review recommends that the Environment Agency should take strategic direction of managing inland flood risks, while local authorities should adopt a new leadership and scrutiny role overseeing flood risk management within their local area.

In general, insurance companies responded quickly and effectively to the emergencies despite the vast number of claims they received from residents and businesses. However, some were less efficient than others and some people have received an unsatisfactory level of service. The Review is discussing with the insurance industry ways of achieving uniformly high standards and this subject will be reviewed again next year.

Chapter 5 deals with the calling of Gold, Silver and Bronze Commands and the response to the flooding emergencies. Relevant aspects of the Civil Contingencies Act were put into practice effectively and there is admiration for the way in which the emergency services and other responders worked tirelessly throughout one of the most complex, challenging and lengthy series of emergencies for many years. However, the Review also believes that the country was not as well prepared as it should have been.

Responders were surprised by the scale and duration of the emergencies and they often found themselves reacting to unexpected events. Sometimes basic information about operation and characteristics of the local drainage systems was unavailable when needed. The vulnerability of critical infrastructure and consequences of its failure were not fully appreciated in advance. The country must be better prepared and the Review makes a series of recommendations about national and local leadership, emergency planning, protection of local emergency facilities, water supplies, rescue and funding mechanisms.

In **Chapter 6** the Review is concerned about the major loss of essential services during the floods. Sites containing critical infrastructure were poorly protected. For example, tens of thousands of people found themselves without tap water and power, 10,000 were stranded on the M5 motorway overnight and 500 were left stranded at Gloucester Railway Station. Even greater loss of essential services was only narrowly avoided and there were major concerns about the complete failure of Ulley Reservoir. The Review makes recommendations on sharing information, building greater standards of protection and the closer involvement in preparedness planning of essential service providers, such as the water and power companies.

People depend on warnings and advice during an emergency. They will have important decisions to make about their safety and that of others, and about the risk of damage to their property. **Chapter 7** describes the efforts made by responders to keep the public informed and the contribution of local media –

especially the ability of local radio to transmit up-to-the-minute broadcasts. The public appreciated the efforts of local authorities and other organisations which systematically knocked on doors and checked on the well-being of residents and businesses. The Report sets out proposals for ensuring that advice and warnings from various agencies are better coordinated, that councils play their full part in reassuring the public and that people are made fully aware of any flood risk when they buy or rent property. It also makes clear that individuals and communities must share responsibility for actions to deal with flooding.

Next steps

This first Report sets out the Pitt Review's initial thinking and proposals after just four months' work. The Review has benefited from the extensive evidence already submitted, but much more needs to be considered before the final Report will be ready next summer. In particular, further work needs to be done to consider the costs, benefits and feasibility of the interim conclusions. Interested individuals and organisations should let us have their views and join in a discussion over the coming months. You can find different ways to contact the Review Team set out in **Chapter 8**. The deadline for comments and further evidence is 31 March 2008.