

To: (District) Joint Transportation Board

By: Kent Association of Local Councils

Date: 10 July 2014

Subject: Christmas and New Year storms and flooding

Classification: Information only

Summary: This report will provide a summary of the views received from Kent Association of Local Councils concerning the impact of the Christmas and New Year storms and floods.

CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR STORMS AND FLOODING

Introduction

This report provides a summary of the views received from KALC member Councils regarding the impact of the Christmas and New Year storms and floods across Kent. It focuses on the response and what improvements need to be made to make us all better prepared for future extreme weather events. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's latest report in March 2014 indicates that global warming is leading to more volatile weather patterns, so the experience this winter is unlikely to be a one-off. This report will be shared with the Kent Recovery Group members such as Kent County Council, Kent Resilience Team, Kent Fire & Rescue Service, Kent Police and the Environment Agency.

Background

Kent and the rest of the country experienced extreme winter weather, which started on 5 and 6 December with the worst tidal surges in 60 years that struck the east coast of England. Kent and the rest of the country was then hit by a storm that started on Monday 23 December and downed trees and power lines and resulted in surface water flooding over Christmas and the New Year. The extreme weather continued during January and February with gale force winds and exceptionally heavy rain with many rivers bursting their banks as river levels soared. The impact of the extreme winter weather affected all parts of Kent both on the coast and inland. There were a number of areas seriously impacted by the floods, for example, Yalding, Bridge, Littlebourne and around the Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells areas, with Yalding making the national media and receiving a visit from the Prime Minister on 27 December.

There was strong criticism nationally of the initial Government response, with over 7,800 homes and nearly 3,000 commercial properties flooded. According to DCLG, about £14 million has been paid out to help communities recover and to meet the costs of protecting lives and properties in the future, with a further £183.5 million due to be paid by local authorities by the end of March.

We recognise that a significant amount of work is already being undertaken by the Environment Agency and the emergency and resilience teams in Kent to address some of the worst affected places such as Yalding and Bridge and coastal towns such as Sandwich. This summary therefore touches on some of these but focuses on other areas in Kent.

Issues across Kent

The following issues/problems arose across the County as a result of the extreme weather:

- Main roads and side roads were flooded, both in towns and village centres and in rural areas;
- Falling trees and telegraph poles blocked main and side roads, some for a considerable time in the rural areas;
- Power outages were widespread with the majority in West Kent and smaller numbers in East Kent, with some prolonged outages.

What was the response?

Given the widespread and extreme nature of the weather that affected all parts of Kent, it is recognised that Kent's emergency and resilience resources were very stretched and put under significant pressure and therefore, as a result, responses varied across Kent, which produced both praise and criticism. There was universal acknowledgement and praise for the determination, dedication and professionalism shown by officers from the multi-agency response teams, particularly with regard to the response along the Nailbourne through Bridge and Littlebourne, which also involved the Armed Services and the British Red Cross.

There was also considerable support from local business and volunteers, with many helping with Kent Police to clear fallen trees from the highway and alleviate the worst effects of the storm. In other areas KCC Highways were on hand to remove fallen trees.

There was praise for Dartford Borough Council who sent in pumping equipment when the River Darent was rising and had a visible presence on site. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council was also praised for the way it responded to requests. There did appear however to be confusion, concern and frustration in other areas over the availability of sandbags. For example it appeared that Sevenoaks District Council was unaware that there was a flood warning on the River Darent on 17 January and residents were being advised that they could not have sandbags. Sandbags were then made available but it was not readily communicated to the public.

There was also praise for the Environment Agency from many Councils, with officers calling door-to-door in Lamberhurst, which was significantly affected by power cuts and flooding.

Whilst there were a lot of positives, there are also a number of areas where improvements should be made to help us all be better prepared for future extreme weather events, both at national, county and local level.

A key area for improvement is in communication between all key partner organisations.

What improvements should be made?

We have grouped these issues in to a number of key themes below:

Theme & Issue	Parish/Town Council	Action
Emergency		
Communication Issues:		
Improved lines of communications between tiers of Local Government & the Environment Agency	CLeFPC (13) DTC (14)	KRU & EA
Improved information and updates and greater resource allocated from power suppliers to providing quicker responses to enquiries	MPC (15)	KRU & UK PN
Real time plotting of information of river levels	LaPC (16)	EA
Improvement of EA and UKPN websites to make them more easily accessible to relevant and up-to-date information	Yalding	EA & UKPN
Roll out of the Flood Warden Scheme	Yalding	EA
Emergency actions:		
Rapid deployment of sandbags	HK&SBPC & SwTC & LPC (18)	PA & EA & KRU
Supply of emergency signage	LaPC (17)	PA & EA & KRU
Strategic		
Funding Issues:		
More resources for monitoring and advice systems	EPPC (1)	EA & KRU
A defined capital expenditure programme	NRoTC (2)	EA & UK PN
Infrastructure Issues:		
Siting of substations and cables to improve resilience	LPC (3)	UK PN
Improved coastal defences: assessment and upgrading	NRoTC (4)	EA
Improved pumping station capacity & improved longer term resilience	NRoTC (5)	SP & EA
Investment in canals, dykes & sewers to allow pumping stations to drain to sea	NRoTC (6)	EA & SP
Investment in dredging of water courses where appropriate and investment in greater maintenance of the rivers, i.e. removing fallen trees and other obstructions, removing vegetation growths from river banks, removing landowners' increase of river bank to the detriment of river flow	CapPC (7) Yalding	<u>EA</u>
Tactical		
Maintenance issues:		
Improving drains, gullies & grips with a programme of clearance. Greater monitoring of ditches in private ownership that are not maintained. When a ditch is piped, there seems to be no method of ensuring a correct size pipe is installed until after the work is completed and complaints received.	AyPC (8), SwTC (9), MPC (10), Yalding	EA & KCCH

Improved tree maintenance and removal of ivy from roadside trees	OfPC (11) & BPC (12)	KCCH/ landowner
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EA Environment Agency ; **UK PN** UK Power Networks; **KRU** Kent Resilience Unit; **SP** Statutory Provider; **KCCH** Kent County Council Highways; **PA** Principal Authority

Examples of Parish and Town Council responses

(1) East Peckham PC	Very heavy flooding. Poor responses on sandbags, road closures and clearance & trees: poor communication.
(2) New Romney TC	Low lying area. Need for capital investment in sea defences: dykes, drains and sewers. Those that have fallen from use need to be reactivated.
(3) Lamberhurst PC	Vulnerable. The assessment of sub stations with regard to capacity, the reciting of vulnerable cables and over reliance on tidal and gravity schemes.
(4) New Romney TC	The movement and displacement of shingle and the need to reduce the need for continuous upgrading of shingle.
(5) New Romney TC	The need to invest in pumping stations to ensure capacity after an adequate assessment of the present and future demands.
(6) New Romney TC	The greater coordination of defences to allow the flow of excess water to the pumping stations for evacuation to the sea
(7) Capel PC	General drainage issues and sewer problems and concerns over water courses not being maintained causing local flooding. Over reliance on ponds.
(8) Aylesham PC & (9) Swanley TC	General road flooding issues: lack of assessment and maintenance despite local monitoring and reporting. Drains blocked on roads resulting in localised flooding particularly roads and housing.
(10) Molash PC	Failure to clear gullies and problems with soakaways and silting up of verges. Regular maintenance poor and communication to date slow.
(11) Offham PC	Many fallen trees and telegraph poles blocking roads. Positive response from PC and local volunteers.
(12) Burham PC	Numerous tree problems with poor clearance follow up issues which may have made issues worse.
(13) Capel Le Ferne PC	Lack of information and general feeling of lacking emergency training: lack of exchanges of information between bodies.
(14) Deal TC	Significant confusion over sandbags and availability and communication with other tiers of LG poor.
(15) Molash PC	Lack of information from power suppliers: the need for dedicated telephone numbers with a real person responding. An isolated parish with vulnerable infrastructure like overhead power cables and prolonged blackouts.
(16) Lamberhurst PC	Flooding fears and perception of cuts undermining confidence in authorities: need for investment in real time monitoring of river levels and data. Investment in keeping water courses clear.

(17) Langdon PC	Problems with roads and fallen trees and resulting lack of signage caused chaos on the roads. Enthusiasm for local input and manpower. The need to reactivate a list of local people with skills and equipment to support community.
(18) Horton & Kirby PC & Swanley TC & Lyminge PC	Poor distribution of sandbags in time: problems accentuated by lack of information and poor command structure. Confusion over responsibilities and telephone priorities and distribution of emergency contact lists: perception of lack of updates and sense of panic.

Working with the Parish and Town Councils

The importance of the multi-agency response teams working closely with the Parish Councils who have local knowledge is essential. A number of Parish and Town Councils have already developed an emergency plan, which were used to good effect during the storms and floods, for example, Yalding.

KALC has been working closely with both KCC's Emergency Planning and Resilience Team and Kent Fire & Rescue Service over the last year on emergency planning and community reassurance and resilience and has held a number of joint workshops, which cover self-help plans, providing emergency centres, contact points etc.

KALC held a Community Resilience and Reassurance Conference on 8 February and was delighted that Kent Fire & Rescue Service, Kent Police and KCC Emergency Planning/Resilience were able to take part given that the event was in the middle of the flooding. The event was very successful and generated significant interest from many Parish Council in developing Emergency Plans.

Another key message from the February event was the recognition that whilst the emergency services and emergency planning/resilience teams from the County and District Council have statutory emergency response roles, more needs to be done both nationally and at county level on personal resilience, as people should also take responsibility for looking after themselves and their families to make themselves more resilient.

KALC will continue to work with KCC to run further workshops during 2014 on Emergency Planning and with Kent Fire & Rescue Service on Community Resilience and Reassurance.

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