

ENVIRONMENT AND ATTRACTIVE CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

FLOOD PLANNING – IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SCRUTINY FUNCTION

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

14 December 2009

1. Why has this report come to the Committee?

- 1.1 This report considers the implications of the Pitt Review and the future role of scrutiny in relation to flood planning.
- 1.2 To recommend that flood planning be formally included within the remit of the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Pitt Review into the floods of summer 2007 was published in June 2008.
- 2.2 The review was a comprehensive appraisal of all aspects of flood risk management in England. The review contained 92 recommendations addressed to the Government, local authorities, Local Resilience Forums, providers of essential services and the general public.
- 2.3 The review considered the measures for reducing the risk and the impact of flooding, improving the emergency response and better preparing of the public. The report highlighted the need for strong and effective leadership at the local and national level and a clear commitment to improve the resilience of the UK to flooding.
- 2.4 The Government has since published its response to Sir Michael Pitt's review and have accepted all of the recommendations. Key recommendations include:-
 - A 25 year plan to address the issue of flooding, along with the creation of a dedicated Cabinet Committee;
 - Local authorities will be responsible for managing the risk of surface water flooding and compile a register of local water assets. Local authorities will be expected to assess and if necessary enhance their technical capacity to deliver flood risk;
 - Stronger planning and building controls for construction and refurbishment in flood risk areas;

- A joint nerve centre run by the Met Office and the Environment Agency to produce more accurate flood warnings based on pooled information;
- Definitive electronic maps of all drainage ditches and streams, making clear who is responsible for maintaining them – these to be drawn up by local authorities, which must take a stronger overall lead on flooding in their area;
- More investment by utility companies to protect key infrastructure sites such as electricity sub station – companies must be more involved in flood defence planning in order to build greater resilience into the system to cope with times of crises;
- Greater openness in the property market to ensure that buyers have a clear understanding of the risks of buying in a flood prone area;
- Better preparation of the public with at risk households receiving support and assistance.

2.5 Overall, the recommendations mean a more strategic leadership role for local authorities on flooding will be seen as being best placed to understand the risks to communities and their concerns.

2.6 The Council's Emergency Planning Manager is coordinating the full implications for the Council. However, it is important to bear in mind that the recommendations will impact on a wide range of services provided by the Council and not just Emergency Planning and Response.

3 Implications for Scrutiny Function

3.1 Of the 92 recommendations contained in the Pitt Review, there are two recommendations that have particular implications for the Council's scrutiny function. These are:-

- i. "All upper tier local authorities should establish Oversight and Scrutiny Committee to review work by public sector bodies and essential service providers in order to manage flood risk, underpinned by a legal requirement to cooperate and share information.
- ii. Each Oversight and Scrutiny Committee should undertake an annual summary of action taken locally to manage flood risk and implement this review and these reports should be public and reviewed by Government Offices and the Environment Agency".

3.2 Clearly, the nature of the recommendations reflects the increased role for scrutiny set out in the Local Government and Public Involvement Act and the potential of scrutiny to provide community leadership on this issue.

- 3.3 It is intended that scrutiny committees will provide a means of helping to improve accountability at a local level, raise the priority of flood risk management within local authorities and amongst partners and ensure good practice in reducing flood risk.
- 3.4 This should lead to greater transparency for the public, including a better understanding of local maintenance regimes, risk and options for managing risk.
- 3.5 It will also be important to obtain the active cooperation of partner organisations including the Environment Agency and the local water company.
- 3.6 The recommendations will represent a significant workload though it is recognised that most authorities will not choose to review flood risk management every year through a full scale scrutiny exercise and that for many authorities a large scale exercise followed by a light annual review would suffice.

4 Next Steps

- 4.1 It is suggested that given its existing remit, the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee would be the most appropriate Scrutiny Committee to take on the responsibility for flood planning. This will require an amendment to the remit of the Committee in order to include flood planning. This will require the approval of Council.
- 4.2 Further details of the way in which the Committee will actually undertake the scrutiny of flood planning will be developed over the coming months. Clearly, this will involve the Committee undertaking an annual summary of action taken locally to manage flood risk and the approach to be taken will be subject to a further report to this Committee.

5.0 Recommendation

- 5.1 That the Council be requested to amend the remit of the Committee to include the function of flood planning;
- 5.2 that a further report be submitted to the Committee on the measures to be taken to scrutinise flood planning as part of the work programme for 2010/11.

6.0 Background Papers

Pitt Report 2008

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