

To: City Executive Board

Date: 10 September 2015

Report of: Scrutiny Committee

Title of Report: Report of the Waste Water Flooding Panel

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To update members and present a recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee following the Waste Water Flooding Panel's recent engagement with Thames Water Utilities on the progress of the Oxford Catchment Study

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Roy Darke

Executive Lead Member: Councillor Bob Price, Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Strategy and Economic Development

Policy Framework: Corporate Plan 2015-2019

Recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee to the City Executive Board:

That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the following recommendation:

1. That the City Council continues to engage with Thames Water Utilities (TWU) at a senior level through the Oxford Area Flood Partnership and other appropriate channels. This should include early engagement in relation to future development proposals that affect TWU.

Background

1. The Waste Water Flooding Panel was set up by the Scrutiny Committee in 2013 with cross party membership to address concerns about sewage flooding across the city. The current members of the Panel are Councillors Darke (Chair), Goddard, Pressel and Thomas.
2. The Panel met with representatives of Thames Water Utilities (TWU) on 9 May 2014 where it was agreed that a catchment study of the sewerage system in Oxford would be brought forward. TWU estimated that it would take 2 years to get to the point of programming works. A small pilot study would also take place independently in Grandpont.

3. The Panel held a further meeting with representatives of Thames Water Utilities on 16 July 2015 to monitor progress of the Grandpont pilot study and the main catchment study. This included a presentation from TWU.
4. The Council's Interim Head of Environmental Development updated the Panel on the work of the Council's Environmental Development service in relation to flooding issues, and recent organisational changes at the City Council. Flood-related activities are dealt with by the Environmental Sustainability team, Housing and Direct Services.
5. Both meetings were attended by Andrew Smith MP, a representative of Nicola Blackwood MP and a member of Oxford Flood Alliance.

Grandpont study

6. With the support of partners including Oxford City Council, TWU led on work investigating the most likely causes of sewer flooding experienced at Grandpont.
7. A condition survey of the sewerage infrastructure and network indicated that it was generally in good condition. There was little evidence to suggest that the state of the sewerage system was the primary factor in the flooding.
8. The study focused on the possible role of private groundwater flood protection devices (sump pumps), which were known to exist in the area. If, for example, they were incorrectly connected to the foul sewer, instead of the surface water network, flood water would quickly overwhelm the sewerage network with the unpleasant result of raw sewage entering properties.
9. To determine whether this was the mechanism for basement flooding, further investigation was needed. Residents recently received an update on the study, and TWU was working with the community to ensure sump pumps were correctly connected.
10. Ahead of the winter period, residents would be advised to discharge water in a flood event into the road and not pump to sewers. Although the discharge of water across footways was not permitted without a suitable licensed channel, it was acceptable as a practical solution in a flood situation.

Catchment study

11. The catchment study was a substantial long term study of the sewerage system in Oxford. It would inform a long term strategy for a robust drainage network, including a cost-beneficial programme of improvement works. The study would also identify actions that partner agencies could take to minimise the risk of flooding incidents.
12. Phase 1 of the catchment study was now largely complete. It involved gathering customer evidence, flow monitoring of the foul system and the surface water system, and asset surveys including the use of CCTV and inspections.
13. TWU reported that during their investigations they came across a number of serious problems, which they had been dealing with on a find and fix basis.

These fixes would open up capacity, improving flows and access. TWU were also working to prevent problems such as fatbergs from occurring and were considering piloting a scheme in Oxford of working with food outlets to prevent commercial fat, oil and grease from entering the sewer network.

14. Phase 2 would involve in depth and on-going inspections of trunk sewers and the development of predictive 3D modelling. This would enable TWU to manage flows effectively in real time to prevent flooding incidents. TWU intended to link their hydraulic models of the foul and surface water systems to the Environment Agency's river model.
15. TWU advised that the sewerage pumping station at Littlemore was the largest in their western region. A specialist team from London was being brought in to clean the wells and trunks, and the two pumps may be replaced with higher capacity models. This would optimise the performance of the station and reduce the risk of it being knocked out by sediment.
16. TWU were keen to improve their customer communications operation and better inform the public of what they are doing and there was now a dedicated [webpage for the Oxford catchment study](#).
17. TWU would welcome advance notice and early engagement from the City Council in relation to major development proposals that may impact them, perhaps through the Oxford Area Flooding Partnership, which met quarterly.

Recommendation – That the City Council continues to engage with Thames Water Utilities (TWU) at a senior level through the Oxford Area Flood Partnership and other appropriate channels. This should include early engagement in relation to future development proposals that affect TWU.

Next steps

18. The Panel agreed to issue a press release to welcome the progress of the catchment study and circulate a communication to all City Councillors.
19. TWU agreed to provide an end of year update to the Flooding Panel. Representatives of the Environment Agency and Oxford Flood Alliance (OAF) and South Oxford Action Group (SOFAG) would be invited to this meeting. TWU would also continue to provide quarterly updates to the Oxford Area Flood Partnership.

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