



CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

**Councillor Mark Thomas, Cabinet
Member for Environment &
Transportation**

BY EMAIL

*Please ask for:
Gofynnwch am:*

Scrutiny

*Direct Line:
Llinell Uniongyrochol:*

01792 636292

*e-Mail
e-Bost:*

scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk

*Our Ref
Ein Cyf:*

*Your Ref
Eich Cyf:*

*Date
Dyddiad:*

8 December 2014

Dear Councillor Thomas,

**Local Flood Risk Management Scrutiny Working Group
13 November 2014**

The Local Flood Risk Management Working Group first met in January 2013 in order to consider the Authority's draft Local Flood Risk Management Strategy. One of the outcomes of this meeting was the recommendation that there should be a further discussion by scrutiny when more detailed plans were developed and there was information about specific areas of risk.

As flood risk and flood hazard maps have now been received by the Authority from the Environment Agency the working group was reconvened on 13 November and received a report from officers which consulted us on the progress being made towards the delivery of the Flood Risk Management Plan (FRMP).

We are grateful to the officers who attended, Mike Sweeney and Stuart Davies, who engaged in a full and frank discussion with the Working Group. This letter reflects the main issues discussed together with our views. We will also be sharing this with the Scrutiny Programme Committee.

Joint working

We learnt that whilst the Local Authority is the lead authority for flood risk management this refers to flooding from local sources such as surface water, ground water and ordinary water courses. There are other agencies who also have responsibility for different aspects of flood risk, namely Natural

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA / DINAS A SIR ABERTAWE

CIVIC CENTRE, SWANSEA, SA1 3SN / CANOLFAN DDINESIG, ABERTAWE, SA1 3SN

www.swansea.gov.uk

Resources Wales (NRW), who are responsible for coastal and main river flooding. At the same time the local authority remains responsible for effective defences which are under council ownership. This emphasised for us the complexity of flood risk planning and the importance of effective multi-agency working. It is essential that the Authority's plan align and link closely with the FRMP being produced by NRW for the Western Wales River Basin District.

Flood Risk and Flood Hazard Maps

Officers explained that whilst the maps represent a step forward in our understanding of the risks to local areas they are not totally accurate and exaggerate the problems somewhat as they do not take into account existing measures to deal with flood risk, for example culverts. The information is not reliable down to a street level, but rather provides an indication of increased risk in certain areas.

Development of the Local Flood Risk Management Plan (FRMP)

We learnt that the next stage to develop the FRMP will involve a detailed assessment of the Flood Risk Maps to determine the priority areas that are prone to surface water flooding. The next step will be to take the work down to a ward level and to develop a map for each ward. This will involve looking at, for example, critical water courses, measures already in place and cross checking our historical information on previous flooding incidents in order to identify what, if any, additional measures will be required. This work will then feed into the FRMP for Swansea. We believe that ward Councillors will be able to provide a significant contribution to this process and therefore should be involved at this stage so that their local knowledge can be used.

Measures to mitigate risk

We were advised that a key part of the FRMP will be measures to mitigate risk. We discussed in detail the issue of maintenance. We believe that many instances of flooding can be attributed to poor drainage. Councillors discussed their experiences of certain areas where this seems to be a common occurrence after heavy rainfall. Councillors also shared examples of culverts that have caused flooding and felt that a good inspection, cleaning and maintenance programme would help prevent flooding. Officers acknowledged that maintenance regimes need to be up-dated and advised us that this work is on-going. As part of this process the Drainage Management Team will be located with the operational team, which should ensure a closer link between strategic planning and operational knowledge. We suggested that officers consider the feasibility of reducing litter cleansing at peak times in autumn in order to focus on increasing leaf collection as part of flood risk mitigation.

We also discussed the further measures that the Authority is exploring in partnership with Dwr Cymru. For example we were interested to learn about the development of sustainable urban drainage systems which aim to manage

surface water within the water table through slow dispersal in grassed areas such as creating swales in verges at road sides. This is much more effective than allowing clean water to be quickly piped away via the sewerage system, as this approach causes a number of problems such as overloading the system through accelerating the flow of water/sewerage within the pipes. We also heard about promoting sustainable land use practices such as avoiding developments where there is a high risk of flood; creating new wetland areas.

We are pleased to see that the authority is looking at new and innovative methods to deal with the risks caused by surface water flooding and we commend the partnership approach.

Public information

A previous recommendation of this working group was that an information leaflet should be produced providing people with advice about who to contact in the event of an incident or how to resolve an issue. We were pleased to be provided with a copy of this leaflet. However we were advised that the information has only been placed on the Council's website. We believe that a wider distribution needs to take place. A copy should be sent to all Councillors and it should also be placed in key community locations such as Council offices, libraries and community centres.

A further suggestion of this group when it met in January 2013 was that the Local Authority should provide sandbags at a nominal charge to the public. The information leaflet explains the Council's policy on sandbags and that it has no statutory duty to provide sandbags and would not be able to respond quickly in an emergency to all the requests it receives. However, we feel that this leaflet should provide additional information explaining the other means by which members of the public can obtain sandbags. We also wish recommended that the Cabinet Member reconsiders this suggestion and looks at the feasibility of the Council providing sandbags to householders in areas of high risk, with an appropriate charge.

Future scrutiny of the Flood Risk Management Plan (FRMP)

We agreed that there should be a further scrutiny discussion once the FRMP is ready for consultation. We will recommend to the Scrutiny Programme Committee that this working group is reconvened for this purpose. Officers advised that the public consultation period is anticipated to take place during February 2015. We also suggested to officers that they should consider the findings and recommendations of the recent scrutiny inquiry into Public Engagement when planning the consultation.

Officers advised us that once the plan is in place there will be an annual monitoring process to assess the progress of implementing the plan and summarise the actions taken locally to manage flood risk. We believe that there will be a role for scrutiny in this process (which is supported by

recommendations in the Pitt Review) and will further recommend to the Scrutiny Programme Committee that the group meets annually as part of the monitoring process in order to be up-dated on the progress of the plan. We suggest that the FRMP includes an explanation of the annual monitoring process and that scrutiny involvement is clearly included in this.

In summary we recommend that you:

- *Ensure that the Flood Risk Management Plan is closely linked to the plans of Natural Resources Wales.*
- *Ensure that ward Councillors are consulted as the FRMP is developed and the work to develop ward level maps takes place.*
- *Consider the feasibility of reducing litter cleansing in areas of high risk at peak times in autumn in order to focus on increasing leaf collection as part of flood risk mitigation.*
- *Ensure the wider distribution of the public information leaflet "Guidance on drainage and flooding".*
- *Provide additional information to the public about how to obtain sandbags and consider the previous suggestion for the Local Authority to provide sandbags, with an appropriate charge.*
- *Include an explanation of the annual monitoring process within the FRMP and ensure that scrutiny involvement is clearly included in this.*

It would be helpful if you could respond to this letter by 5 January 2014. Scrutiny letters and responses are included in the agenda of the Scrutiny Programme Committee as the committee maintains an overview of all scrutiny activities, and monitors correspondence. We look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,

COUNCILLOR SUE JONES

Convener, Local Flood Risk Management Scrutiny Working Group

✉ Susan.M.Jones@swansea.gov.uk