To:
Councillor Mark Thomas
Cabinet Member for Environment Services

Please ask for: Gofynnwch am: Scrutiny

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Summary: This is a letter from the Local Flood Risk Management Working Group to the Cabinet Member for Environment Services following the meeting of the Working Group on 20 February 2018. It is about the Local Flood Risk Management Plan.

Dear Cllr Thomas

The Local Flood Risk Management Scrutiny Working Group met on 20 February to receive an annual update on progress with the Local Flood Risk Management Plan. This letter provides you with feedback from that meeting.

We would like to thank you and Mike Sweeney for attending to present the annual update and to answer our questions. We appreciate your engagement and input.

Whilst the Working Group found the meeting informative and interesting, it did have some concerns and we would like to make the following comments.

The Working Group asked about progress made on the recommendations in the Convener's letter following the meeting in 2017:

- Availability of prioritised programme of works – we heard that the Authority has a list of areas that require work. The list may be made available to all Councillors, but there is concern about making it available as well to the public, given that the works are only able to go ahead when funding is available. We suggested that the list be made available to the public on request.

- For the programme of works list, we think that only one coding system should be used, either high/low coding or a traffic light system, but not both. You agreed that it would be better to use one coding system and we hope to see this actioned.

- Review and update flood risk leaflet and include advice on ways to protect property from flooding – we were informed that the old leaflet is online but is out of date. A new one will be available online once the Emergency Planning website has been updated, as a new one will need to link in to this. We requested a timeline detailing when the website will be updated and when the leaflet with new content will be on online. You agreed to provide firm dates in your response to the Convener's letter.

- We would also like to see the flood risk leaflet available online, and would like to see paper copies of the new leaflet made available in libraries, community centres etc.

We then moved on to discuss this year's update.

- Flood risk management plan –we heard that a consultant had been appointed to look at areas of high risk, and that studies have been carried out and these would need to be evaluated with options then considered. The Authority only has a small amount of funding, so will need to apply for grants from Welsh Government for spending over and above this.

- Infrastructure for new developments/estates – we felt that the infrastructure is not properly in place in terms of flood risk. We were informed that, for planning applications, Natural Resources Wales and Welsh Water are statutory consultees. If they give a new development the green light there is nothing the Local Authority can do about it. We were concerned to learn this.

- We wanted to know if the Authority is spending the money it has for flood risk in the most effective way. We were told that the department is constantly looking for improvement, but you believe the money is being spent in the most effective way. There is £400k a year allocated for highways drainage, and flood risk puts more of a strain on this.

- Page 9 of report – staff structure – we thought that the structure looks very management top heavy. We were informed that the managers are supervisors who go out on site and don't just manage staff. This is the structure for highways and not just flood risk, with only a small amount of time being spent on flood risk.

- Cleaning of gullies – we heard that gullies are cleaned on average once every three years, and that staff are diverted to deal with flooded gullies. We would like to see the programme of works for gullies made available to councillors.

- We heard that road sweeping is also carried out and that this has a separate programme of works.

- Flood risk long term plan – we raised the issue of long term projections with regard to more frequent heavier rainfall, and that these have implications for Swansea; we need to have a long-term strategy. You told us that this is an increased service pressure and resources are inadequate; however, the Welsh Government has recognised the long-term projections, and hopefully more money will be available for flood risk schemes.

- Asset data collection is underway – we were pleased this is happening. Local knowledge is very useful, and the public can help with providing information. The Local Authority does not know about all of its assets – grids, drains, gullies etc. We heard that the public should contact the Highways Department to identify where any grids, drains are. Highways can then come out and clean them, as it has responsibility for maintaining them.

- New statutory duty in May 2018 – we learned that there will be a new Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) Approving Body. New resources will need to be found for this body, and a decision is yet to be made about whether it will be regional. Developers will have to take account of drainage on their sites. It will release the burden on current infrastructure. The Local Authority will be required to adopt water features on developments greater than two properties. There is concern over where the money will come from in the first place. It is hoped that the new duty for water features will lead to more highways being put up for adoption. We feel that this represents a positive way forward.

- It is good to see that green infrastructure is increasingly being introduced, since working with nature needs to be understood and given a more up-front role in the reduction of flood risk.

- Consultation on new byelaws – we were informed that a consultation will be taking place on this shortly for a period of six weeks. Byelaw 5 is very important: building of structures, pipes etc on land liable to flooding – no one will be able to build over Local Authority assets like culverts.

Following the meeting, we discussed progress and came to the following conclusions:

1. We would like to see the Prioritised Programme of Works available to the public on request. We would also like to see one coding system used for this list of works.
2. We were pleased to hear that communications are a priority for the Department, as this is essential. We would therefore like to receive a timeline detailing when the website will be updated, and when the Flood Risk leaflet with new content will be on line. We would also like to see paper copies of this leaflet made available in public places.
3. We feel that the Flood Risk Management Plan is based on historical data, is out of date and therefore needs to be reviewed. Also, we think it is important to raise awareness of the studies, with the public in the area to be made aware of the situation and given a timetable.
4. Notwithstanding the financial effects of austerity, we feel that flood risk, as a major issue, needs to be properly resourced. We note that, despite budget constraints, some work is going on to prevent flood risk. We would like to know if it is possible to put a number of schemes together, and submit one major application for grant funding.
5. We welcome Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) being introduced and would like to be informed if they apply to commercial properties. We feel that use has to be made of all methods for drainage and flood management, and SuDS will be good for the environment as well as doing the job.
6. We would like to see awareness raising re SuDS, particularly for Planning Officers, and with training possibly for all Councillors.

7. With regards to Planning, we feel that there is a need to look at historical records when considering applications, and to be prepared to question the advice from Natural Resources Wales and Welsh Water.
8. We believe that quite often the solution to issues is a good maintenance programme and that local knowledge for maintenance is very important. We suggest that a trawl of councillors is undertaken for issues in their local areas that are not on the current maintenance list. We feel that the Department should be able to deviate from the current works schedule if an important risk arises.
9. We would like the programme of works for gullies to be made available to Councillors.
10. We feel an opportunity is being missed with regards to self-help. We all need to take pride in where we live. We would like to see a scheme put in place to encourage this. Maybe there could be something in the new leaflet to encourage people to take responsibility for the area outside their own front door?
11. We feel that an update will be needed in six months' time to ensure that progress on the recommendations is being made; we will therefore be recommending to the Scrutiny Programme Committee that they consider adding this to their work programme for 2018/19.

Your Response

We hope that you find this letter useful and informative. We are interested in hearing your thoughts about the issues raised and would ask that you respond by 24 April 2018.

Yours sincerely

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