

WORCESTERSHIRE SUMMER FLOODS 2007

Joint Scrutiny Task Group

2.00pm, 28 April 2008

DISCUSSIONS WITH:

- National Farmers' Union (2.00-4.00pm)
- Country Land and Business Association (2.00-4.00pm)
- Chamber of Commerce (4.00-5.00pm)
- Worcestershire Partnership (5.30-6.00pm)
- Emergency Planning Manager (Worcestershire CC) (6.00–6.30pm)
- Highways Officers, Worcestershire County Council (6.30-7.00pm)

Background

1. The aim of the scrutiny is:

- To review the immediate response to the floods by local/public agencies and the recovery since.
- To consider what action needs to be taken to ensure there is a clear approach to dealing with any future emergency.
- To make recommendations to County Council, District and Borough Councils, and other agencies and individuals as appropriate.

2. The general theme of this meeting is the impact of the floods on, and role of, the community and the support provided for businesses to recover from the floods.

Format of meeting

3. Attendees will be asked to set out their views or experiences on the immediate response to the floods and recovery since, and whether there are any possible areas for improvement. This will then be followed by a general discussion with each group. Suggested issues to discuss are set out below.

4. Details of the response from Worcestershire County Council to the national Pitt Review have been circulated. Members may wish to comment on relevant recommendations and interim conclusions from the Review (as listed).

National Farmers' Union (NFU) Andrew Richards (Senior Policy Adviser, Environment)

Country Land and Business Association (CLA) Peter Hughes and Mr Stephen Watkins (local farmer)

5. The National Farmers' Union represents the farmers and growers of England and Wales. Its central objective is to promote successful and socially responsible agriculture and horticulture, while ensuring the long term viability of rural communities.

6. The Country Land and Business Association (CLA) is the leading national organisation which represents and supports businesses in rural communities, covering all aspects of land use and management.

7. Stephen Watkins attended a meeting of Sir Michael Pitt's review team and the NFU on 2 April 2008, at an NFU members' farm near Upton on Severn - see <http://www.nfuonline.com/x26643.xml> Some of the problems farmers and growers had experienced were highlighted by the NFU at that meeting. These included:

- Catastrophic losses of crop, grazing and fodder at the time of the flood
- Considerable expense in clearing and disposing of waste and debris washed down by the floodwaters
- Housing livestock right through the summer
- Insurance issues (insurability of assets)
- Little assistance or help towards the cost of this waste clearing and disposal, such as waiving the fee for waste disposal, offers of support to help the clear up by the local authority came too late
- The only support provided by government to farming, was limited to a maximum 3000 Euros, due to State Aid rule
- The way in which the support was delivered varied across different Regional Development Agencies, as did the level of information and complexity of the application form
- The farmers also felt that they had helped the local community considerably and would like greater recognition, and
- How farmers could help the authorities in the future with both their understanding of the local area as well as equipment which could help at times of emergencies.

8. Suggested issues for discussion with the NFU and CLA:

- The impact of the floods on the farming and rural community
- Communication and information flows between the County and District Councils and rural communities (e.g. with regards to information received at the time and support since)
- The level of support which was and should be provided to farmers and the rural business community, to limit or alleviate the impact of flooding.
- Is Business Continuity Planning being promoted and has (or had) advice been given on how to prepare?

Pitt Review interim conclusions	51, 60, 65 and 69
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Chamber of Commerce (4-5pm) - Chris Harvey (Head of Policy and Representation)

9. The Chamber of Commerce Herefordshire and Worcestershire has been the voice of business in the two counties since 1832, actively promoting trade, lobbying for members' interests and facilitating training and workforce development. The Chamber of Commerce helps businesses by providing easy access to help, advice, support and growth opportunities. The Chamber of Commerce strives to represent the interests of its members in both Westminster and Brussels.

10. Suggested issues for discussion with the Chamber of Commerce:

- The impact of the floods on local businesses
- The level of support which was and should be provided to the business community, to limit and/or alleviate the impact of flooding
- The support that has been provided to businesses to help recovery after the floods
- Is Business Continuity Planning being sufficiently promoted and has (or had) advice been given on how to prepare for floods in future?

Pitt Review interim conclusions	51, 60, 65 and 69
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Worcestershire Partnership, 5.30 – 6.00pm Simon Adams (Head of Community Leadership WCC) representing Michael Clarke (Chairman of Worcestershire Partnership) and Pete Smith (Planning Economy & Regeneration Manager, WCC)

11. Worcestershire Partnership is a multi-agency group comprising the heads of local government, public services such as health, learning providers, police and probation, voluntary and community organisations and local businesses within Worcestershire. The work of the Partnership is based on a shared common purpose and good will. It tackles issues that affect Worcestershire residents' quality of life - such as crime, health, jobs, education and transport.

12. The Worcestershire Partnership Board agreed to oversee the county's flood recovery in areas such as the economy, tourism, infrastructure and the environment. The Management group took the lead in developing a recovery plan to address the impact of the floods. This resulted in Worcestershire securing £725,000 from the £1m regional Flooded Area Recovery Programme established by Advantage West Midlands (the Regional Development Agency).

13. Simon Adams will give a brief overview of the Worcestershire Partnership's response to the flooding in the short, medium and long term.

14. Members have already received details of the Economic Recovery Plan and the AWM flood recovery funding package as part of their background information pack. This shows that £600,000 is being used to fund short term projects to help

the economies of affected towns whilst £125,000 supported additional promotion for activities and events to assist the tourism economy in the short term.

15. Pete Smith will discuss the management of the recovery phase more specifically in areas such as the economy, infrastructure and the environment. He can explain the processes involved and give an indication of the types and size of work undertaken as part of the economic recovery

16. Suggested issues for discussion:

- The types of work which qualified for grants and why individual businesses were not eligible
- Progress on the delivery of works and reasons for delays
- Any areas for improvement?

Pitt Review interim conclusions	26, 51 and 60
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Emergency Planning Manager, Worcestershire County Council (6-6.30pm) - Nick Riding

17. The County Council has a variety of roles to fill when responding to an emergency, both in support of its partners in the Emergency and other Services and in its role in community leadership

18. The County Council and all six District Councils have signed up to a Memorandum of Understanding under which the small specialised team of Emergency Planners at the County Council support the District Councils, as well as all the Directorates in the County Council, in their duties under the Civil Contingencies Act. This helps to deliver a unified local authority preparedness and response capability to a major emergency incident

19. Besides this internal work in the Local Authorities, the team is involved in a lot of work with other Agencies – for example the Environment Agency on flooding and pollution problems, emergency services on all types of problems and health authorities.

20. Worcestershire County Council's response to the Pitt Review's conclusions and recommendations was compiled by the County's Emergency Planning Manager and sent on 31 March 2008. The response was previously circulated to county councillors at the beginning of April and has been re-circulated to members with this agenda, for ease of reference. The recently published Pitt Review's 'Chapter 9: Recovering from the floods' has also been circulated to members with this agenda.

21. Issues arising from the Pitt Review of particular interest to local authorities are firstly, whether Surface Water Management Plans (SUDS) should be carried out at county or district planning level and secondly, should the county or district be responsible for a 'door knocking' flood warning for residents.

22. Other suggested issues for discussion:

- Other comments on the County Councils response to the Pitt Review?
- The impact of the floods on the county and the effectiveness of the county and district councils' response before during and after the event? Are there any areas for improvement
- The Police were under the impression that the County Council acted on behalf of district councils during an emergency - Is there a clear distinction and understanding of the respective roles of County / District / Parish and Town Council local authority tiers in an emergency – How can this be made clearer to partners such as the police/ fire service?

Highways Officers (6.30-7pm) - Ian Bamforth, Interim Service Head for Countryside and Highways during the floods) and Jon Fraser (Customer and Response Manager)

23. There was considerable damage to the road infrastructure during the summer floods, the financial cost of which was estimated at £6m. This ranged from bridges collapsing to flooded drains and also of course the catastrophic collapse of the road at Cropthorne. Over 100 separate incidents were dealt with on our roads, the most serious being the B4084 at Cropthorne.

24. The Scrutiny Task Group discussed how drainage issues were being addressed at the last meeting on 7 April and would now like a wider discussion with the highway authority to include the suggested issues below.

25. Suggested issues for discussion:

- The highways authority's response to and experiences during the floods and the recovery since
- Ensuring that residents were correctly informed of road closures in the county was an important part of the highway authority's role. Did communications work effectively between the county and district, the local media and other partners? Are the roles and responsibilities of local authorities understood by all partners
- The effectiveness of liaison between the Highways Agency and Highway Authority and whether any issues or lessons for the future arose.
- Their views on the wider engagement with and involvement of the local community, for example, having locally stored road closed or road flooded signs for use by local people in communities at risk?
- What more could or should be done?