

Worcestershire County Council and District Councils
Joint Scrutiny on Flooding
Report of meeting at County Hall Monday 28th April.

Attendees County Council Officers, Members from the District Councillors and various witnesses. The meeting lasted five and half hours.

National Farmers Union. Started by commenting on the notes from the previous meeting. Suggested that Seven Trent were both making progress but that they were ill prepared. Implied that Environment Agency had changed the rules by not allowing farmers to control the sluice gates and had the wrong figures on soil moisture. Claimed that British Waterways used to harrow the bed of the rivers to remove silt. Planners need to consider conditions that hold surface water on site.

Country Land and Business Association. Continued with joint comments that loss of crops and contamination of grass land both led to a financial loss that was uninsurable. In many cases there was no help with the clean up even though Seven Trent dump raw sewage into the river system. This contamination can blight land for up to two years (root crops). If it is intended to flood farm land to save urban areas then compensation needs to be considered. Farmers have local knowledge that will help, have the right to protect their land, could affect lower reaches. The Environment Agency no longer collect the flood rubbish. Concerned that there are different rules for the farmers and house holders. Asserted that the advance warnings were inaccurate. Their conclusion was that there was little consistency in the way farmers were treated, even though they had the will, man power and resources to help.

Chamber of Commerce. The impact of the floods were significant over the County both directly from the water and consequentially from the effect of loss of trade and the time taken to recover. There was a problem with the utility companies who required evidence that was not available. Many Members would like access to senior Officers out of hours who either had answers or who “knew a man who did”. This would only operate once an emergency had been called. The information from the radio was very good but the flood was at the wrong time of the year. Expected in the winter. County and District Councils could help with the movement of goods and personnel plus the answer to “where can I...?” type questions. Accommodation and storage were a problem. The chamber could help with a list of Council approved contractors who could supplement the Council’s own work force.

Worcestershire Partnership Managed the problem on behalf of the West Midland Resilience Forum. Were a little slow this time but still managed to set up ‘Hub Lets’ (information centres) in localities that needed them. Received £750,000 from Action West Midlands. Available to help with emergency planning down to town or parish level.

WCC Highways officers. Worked more than 36 hours flat out and ran out of signs 250 extras now purchased. Now able to update the web site in real time to provide the public with instant information. Discussion was short as time had run out.

Councillor Mike Chalk - Redditch Borough Council