

**Report to:** Communities Scrutiny Committee

**Date of Meeting:** 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2018

**Lead Member/Officer:** Lead Member for Highways, Planning and Sustainable Travel/Head of Highways and Environmental Services

**Report Author:** Flood Risk Manager

**Title:** Investigation into the 19<sup>th</sup> July 2017 Floods

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**1. What is the report about?**

On the 19th of July 2017, a period of very heavy rainfall led to the surface water flooding of a significant number of properties in the north of the county, both residential and commercial. Council officers, as well as officers from Natural Resources Wales and Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water, have since carried out investigations into the flooding to understand the reason why the flooding occurred, the likelihood of it happening again and to assess whether measures can be put in place to reduce flooding in future.

**2. What is the reason for making this report?**

Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act requires that the Council investigates instances of flooding in the county and subsequently publishes a report of the investigation's findings. The purpose of this report is to introduce the Section 19 flood investigation report and its findings to members of the Committee and to seek their views and comments.

**3. What are the Recommendations?**

That the Committee considers whether the Council requires to implement or revise working practices with a view to mitigating against the future risk of flooding in the county.

**4. Report details**

- 4.1 The flooding that affected Denbighshire on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2017 was, statistically speaking, a rare event. According to reports provided since by Natural Resources Wales and the Met Office, the return period of the rainfall event was around 1 in 50 years. This means that there is a 1 in 50 chance of a similar event occurring in any one calendar year.
- 4.2 Officers from the Council began gathering information regarding the extent of the flooded areas and numbers of properties flooded, as well as the possible source of flood water, as the event occurred. However, the flooding covered a wide geographical area which meant that it took several weeks to gain a detailed understanding of the extent to which communities were affected. Residential and commercial properties were flooded in St Asaph, Rhuddlan, Rhyl and Prestatyn.

- 4.3 The flooding that occurred is best described as a pluvial event, that is, due to surface water, rather than emanating from a watercourse. Rhuddlan, Rhyl and Prestatyn are served by combined sewers, which carry sewerage as well as surface water. These sewers are the responsibility of Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water and many failed to cope with the volume of flows, which exceeded the capacity for which they were designed. Investigation work that Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water has carried out since the event indicates that blockages in pipes and problems with pumping stations exacerbated the flooding, but did not cause it.
- 4.4 Much of the flood investigation work has involved working in close partnership with Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water and Natural Resources Wales, building on the close working relationships developed over the past decade.
- 4.5 The Council has secured Welsh Government grant funding to carry out a drainage study at Ffordd Derwen, Rhyl and is working in collaboration with Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water and Natural Resources Wales to investigate whether improvements can be made to the management of Rhyl Cut and Prestatyn Gutter, as well as adjacent drains and sewers, with the hope that flood risk can be reduced. Both pieces of work are ongoing and should be complete by September 2018.
- 4.6 Concerns have been raised by Members previously regarding the impact of new developments on surface water flood risk. Whilst planning policy is intended to safeguard new and existing development from flood risk, the Welsh Government has recognised that there is room for improvement and has decided to implement Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act, with the result that local authorities in Wales will become sustainable drainage system (SuDS) approval bodies (SABs) in May 2018. As a consequence, the majority of new developments will require that the drainage system is approved before construction can start. It is expected that this will result in developers placing well designed sustainable drainage as a foremost consideration, rather than being 'slotted in' to the development, which has often been the case in the past. There could also be opportunities for the Council to approve and adopt retro-fitted SuDS serving existing communities, which should reduce flood risk. The Council is working with Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water to identify locations in Denbighshire where this might be appropriate.
- 4.7 The UK Government is intending to release UK Climate Projections 2018 (UKCP18) in November 2018. It is likely that this will reinforce the current understanding that extreme rainfall events, such as that experienced in July last year, will happen more often. The Council has an opportunity, working with flood risk management partners, to mitigate the impacts of climate change through effective flood risk management.
- 4.8 The Council's Section 19 report is included in Appendix 1.

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

One of the Council's corporate priorities for 2017 to 2022 is to provide an attractive and protected environment, supporting wellbeing and economic prosperity. One of the measures identified in the Corporate Plan to enable this is to reduce the number of properties at risk of flooding in Denbighshire. The flood investigation report has

highlighted opportunities to help achieve this measure, some of which will involve working in close collaboration with Natural Resources Wales and Welsh Water.

**6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

The costs to the Council of carrying out flood investigation work are met within existing revenue budgets, notwithstanding the Ffordd Derwen drainage study which is 85% funded by the Welsh Government (Council contribution £3,750). The costs of the SAB function are yet to be determined, however it is hoped that the fees chargeable to developers will mean that the activity is self-funding.

**7. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

The flood investigation has involved discussions, meetings and exchanges of correspondence with County Councillors and members of the communities that were flooded. Numerous meetings have taken place with officers from Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water and Natural Resources Wales.

**8. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

The Council has a responsibility to investigate flood events in the county and an implied duty under the Flood and Water Management Act to improve its understanding of flood risk. If the Council fails in this, there is a risk of reputational damage and flooded communities will continue to be at risk.

**9. Power to make the Decision**

The Council has powers in relation of flood risk and drainage matters under the Flood and Water Management Act (2010) and the Land Drainage Act (1991).

Section 7.2.3 of the Council's Constitution states that Scrutiny may "consider any matter which affects the Council's area or its inhabitants."

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