

Flood Risk Action Group (FRAG)
12 May 2021 @ 3.30pm - Virtual Meeting via Teams

Meeting Minutes

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

Present

Councillor Karen Shore - Chair
Councillor Paul Roberts
Councillor Hugo Deynem
Councillor Sam Naylor
Councillor Paul Williams
Councillor Gillian Edwards
Councillor Andrew Cooper
Mark Averill (MA) – Head of Highways and Transport
Kieran Collins (KC) – Highways Commissioner
Jim Gibbins (JG) – Place Area Commissioner
Andrew Coward (AC) – Major Flood Event Management Engineer

Mark Averill, the newly appointed interim Head of Highways and Transport introduced himself to the Flood Risk Action Group members.

Apologies

No apologies were given

2. Approval of draft Terms of Reference (ToR)

KC introduced the ToR which was presented to the FRAG members on the screen. KC gave a brief background to the 2019 major flood event that occurred in Northwich Town Centre, Sandy Lane, Weaverham and Lakeside Caravan Park in which the final S19 report was presented to Cabinet on 17 March 2021.

It was agreed at Cabinet that a FRAG, chaired by the Deputy Leader be established to oversee and effective delivery of the recommended actions set out in S19 2019 flood investigation report. In addition, develop a programme of initiatives, schemes and resources that help the borough recover from the flooding impacts of Storm Christoph and improve flood risk management and resilience.

Cllr Shore emphasized the requirement to report back progress from the FRAG meetings to Cabinet at its meeting in July 2021. To ensure positive action is being undertaken there would be a need to schedule FRAG meetings every 2 to 3 weeks. Cllr Shore also highlighted the need to look at the S19 recommendations, liaise with local businesses and develop schemes and become accountable.

Membership of the FRAG, Cllr Shore indicated that other Members may want a seat on this action group, however whilst their involvement would be welcomed and appreciated, Cllr Shore is content with the current core membership of the FRAG. Other local Members may wish to share ideas with the group should they wish to do so. Cllr Naylor highlighted the understanding of the group and that it is made up of elected Members and Officers and there is no one from the Risk Management Authorities (RMA's). Cllr Naylor also mentioned that this groups remit is to look at the actions and solutions in place and minimise the risk of further flooding.

KC made the group aware that some of the recommendations from the 2019 major flood event are not all for the Council and some are for the RMA's. Both Cllrs Cooper and Naylor are under constant pressure of what we are doing in Northwich and highlighted the need for early solutions to ensure this does not happen again, similar with Cllr Edwards in the Acton Bridge area.

Cllr Deynem raised concerns of the roll out of the recommendations and actions of the S19 report and the timeline and can this be processed by July's Cabinet meeting? Cllr Shore indicated that the intention of the group is to bring an interim report to Cabinet in July, however this is a valid point and we may need to extend. Cllr Roberts agreed with Cllr Deynem and felt that we will not have time to get involved in all the flooding issues and that both Northwich and Acton Bridge will be given higher priority as opposed to lower affected areas in other rural areas. Cllr Cooper agreed with this and highlighted the need to put some focus into Northwich and try and have some engagement with United Utilities (UU) to get some modelling done for us and understand the issues in Northwich and how the Canal and River Trust manage their sluice gates and locks. Cllr Roberts commented on using Welsh Water, however KC mentioned that there were around 19 separate areas with most of them being with UU. Cllr Shore mentioned the Cheshire Mid-Mersey Partnership (CMM) and the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC) and could we ask them both on whether we can draw a resource, even though we pay a levy.

FRAG ACTION 1: KC to raise the issue of resources at the next CMM Strategic Partnership meeting which is scheduled for 19 July 2021.

Cllr Roberts mentioned that the ToR refers to the S19 report in Northwich and this only refers to internal flooded properties. KC explained the reasoning of S19 reporting for internal flooded properties as opposed to external that includes gardens, garages and outbuildings and we are limited with what we can do.

3. **Attendance by Risk Management Authorities (RMA's).**

This was discussed under the Terms of Reference item and attendance by the RMA's can be included as and when required.

4. **Northwich 2019 S19 Investigation Recommendations**

KC gave a summary of the 19 recommended actions resulting from the 2019 major flood event that occurred in Northwich Town Centre and surrounding areas. This was presented on the screen which is a direct extract from Chapter 10 of the final S19 report. KC suggested at the next FRAG meeting, the group will go through each one of the actions listed and provide an update on each one. It was noted that some of the listed actions will show progress and some will not have much done on them.

FRAG ACTION 2: KC to bring a progress report with each one of the recommendations to the next meeting.

Cllr Roberts mentioned that clearly the heading is Northwich but some of them will be relevant to similar areas across the borough, for example (Action ID3) – *Continue a programme of highway drain inspections and cleaning activities and undertake a programme of repairs to significant defects.*

Cllr Deynem asked that we give some prioritisation with the listed actions, though KC said this has been looked at, though the update at the next meeting will give some priority of running order. KC gave an example that (Action ID1) could take up to 18 months to resolve and that (Action ID2) could take a shorter timeframe. Cllr Shore did say that the first 10 are taken in priority order and looking at (Action ID8) there has been a chunk of work already undertaken on this one.

KC mentioned that between the interim and the final report we have surveyed, cleaned and CCTV'd on the Northwich Town Centre drains and we have a very detailed report with the findings, in which there will be a separate meeting with Officers and the EA to discuss.

FRAG ACTION 3: JG to distribute report to FRAG members before the next meeting.

Cllr Naylor asked whether the recommendations mention the word “dredging”? KC responded by saying this will be brought into (Action ID9) in relation of the operation and maintenance of the sluices on the River Weaver. Cllr Naylor felt that the issue of dredging needs putting to bed and after speaking with David Brown from the EA who indicated that this is not an issue, where others may say the issue of dredging is still having an effect on flooding. Dredging may have happened in the past and KC said we may want to invite both the EA and CRT at the appropriate time and deal with their issues and address the issue of dredging and understand what is the EA/CRT view?

Cllr Edwards mentioned that the CRT has undertaken a 3-month dredging from Acton to Dutton Locks as pressure was building on the CRT to undertake this work. Cllr Naylor highlighted that this needs to be done on a wider scope and decide whether we finally dredge or not.

FRAG ACTION 4: KC to contact EA and CRT with regards to their thoughts on dredging, This, however, may be addressed when we invite the RMA's to a FRAG meeting.

Cllr Cooper raised there is a need to do some CCTV work around Waitrose. KC commented in that we are building up a picture with Northwich Town Centre to understand what UU assets are and which are owned by the Council.

Cllr Shore raised how we manage the stakeholder group and their technical questions as Members don't have that expertise to answer them fully and we may need to consider putting this information on the website. KC reiterated that we need to be mindful if there are technical questions, we need to be factual, open and transparent, but also we may need to go away and find out the answers and may not be able to provide an answer at stakeholders meetings.

FRAG ACTION 5: MA suggested at the next meeting we wish to bring a flavour of those questions of what is being asked and not being asked.

Cllr Williams raised the height of river may have been raised at some stage and additional metal rings at the locks at Dutton. This is a question that we need to raise with CRT when we invite the RMA's to a future FRAG?

5. Storm Christoph Update

The flooding impacts from Storm Christoph was briefly discussed during the above agenda items, however at the next FRAG meeting a progress update with the work we are undertaking with both Atkins and Betts consultants will be provided.

6. Future Work Programme – programme of initiatives, schemes and resources that help the borough recover from the flooding impacts of Storm Christoph and improve flood risk management and resilience.

There was very little discussion on this item, however it is important that we continue to manage the flooding impacts resulting from Storm Christoph and develop future work programmes to improve flood risk management and resilience.

7. Any Other Business

Cllr Naylor raised the question of managing expectation with the public and gave an example of the concerns raised by Bill Briggs who is an affected business property owner resulting from the Northwich Town Centre floods. MA suggested that the next FRAG meeting has a public focus and then the following FRAG meeting concentrates on the RMA's. Cllr Shore highlighted the need for a separate session for the public, though Cllr Williams said we may find ourselves completely swamped with questions from dealing with the emotional impacts rather than focusing on the solutions to improve flood risk management to those 2019 recommendations.

Cllr Cooper raised that the next meeting update on the 2019 recommendations is likely to include a deep dive into the first action point, though KC did say this could take longer than expected just on one item. Cllr Cooper made comments of the purpose of the group in that this is not a duplicate on flood risk management and spend time on what is going to be covered by Flooding Scrutiny. The group is about the S19 recommendations getting addressed, involving the likes of Bill Briggs and inviting the RMA's to a meeting. Cllr Cooper also made the group aware that the EA has done a press release on the Flood and Coastal plan and asked whether we were aware of this? This would be helpful with what we are doing, and KC mentioned that we will look to bid for all sorts of funding where possible for flood risk.

MA asked whether the next meeting can be within the public domain and whether it can be streamed, casted or recorded? This would need to be discussed with Democratic Services and to understand what control there would be.

8. Date and times of next meetings

Tuesday, 25 May 2021 @ 5pm – Virtual meeting via Teams