

Flood Risk Action Group (FRAG)
19 July 2021 @ 4.00pm - Virtual Meeting via Teams

Meeting Minutes

Welcome, introductions and apologies

Present

Councillor Karen Shore – Chair

Councillor Hugo Deynem

Councillor Paul Roberts

Councillor Sam Naylor

Councillor Andrew Cooper

Kieran Collins (KC) – Highways Commissioner

Jim Gibbins (JG) – Place Area Commissioner

Andrew Coward (AC), Major Flood Event Management Engineer

Andrew Needham (AN) – Guest on behalf NFPG

Claire Nicholls (CN) – Environment Agency

Craig Turner (CT) – Environment Agency

Apologies

Apologies were given from Councillor Gillian Edwards, Councillor Paul Williams, David Brown, Environment Agency, William Briggs – Briggs and Partners & Northwich Flood Protection Group (NFPG) and Phil Green, the Council's Media and Communication Manager.

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1. Minutes of previous meeting

Members of the group approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 6 July 2021.

2. Approval of Actions Matrix

KC provided an update on the action's matrix.

FRAG Action 1 – KC mentioned that there was a slight amendment to this action with the CMM Strategic meeting being held on 19/07/21 was Officer only and KC will contact Cllr Matt Bryan separately to discuss the issue of resources and therefore this action will be kept open.

FRAG Action 7 – there is a provisional meeting set up for 10/08/21, scope taken on board by CRT and now included in the discussion – final scope gone out to the RMA's.

FRAG Action 8 – speaking with designers with regards to the repairs and will stay open.

FRAG Action 9 – looking at locations for the sump, well on the way and hope to get all information as soon as possible.

FRAG Action 12 – looking at some sites this week and on 02/08/21 in Northwich. Cllr Naylor raised the question of what was the cause of the flooding at Church Witton Walk School? AC provided an update and mentioned that water ingress was coming from all areas, sewer runs east to the school and they have ACO drains across the doorway – the school could not sandbag efficiently due to these drains backing up and flooding the school. It was highlighted that the cause of the flooding will be teased out by the S19 flood investigation. Cllr Cooper mentioned that in between the school and River Dane, Church Walk paddling pool and the Town Council were recommissioning the paddling pool and it may be a slightly different picture with the removal of silt, chlorine, and other debris in the drainage systems.

FRAG Action 13 – KC has written to CRT as several questions have been asked by this group, but no response has been received as yet. KC agreed to write to Daniel Cross at CRT.

FRAG Action 16 – Bill Briggs raised some questions in an email to KC and those have included in the meeting papers today. This action can now be closed.

FRAG Action 18 – multi-agency briefs to be shared with Atkins

FRAG Action 19 – KC has emailed CRT; however, no response has been received back. Action to remain open.

FRAG Action 20 – KC raised the FRAG's ToR in relation to both Atkins and Betts (non-commercially sensitive) and what can be shared with the group.

3. Update on Storm Christoph S19 Investigations – Kieran Collins

KC started the discussion around the S19 investigations by highlighting to the group of the costs (£934k) the Council has incurred in responding to Storm Christoph and is broken down as follows:

- Costs incurred last financial year (2020/21) in responding to the flooding as a result of Storm Christoph and includes: hotel accommodation for evacuated residents, sandbags, repairs, skips and tankers for clearing flood water. **£487K**
- Requested additional resources to increase the size of the Council's existing Flood Risk Management Team, to manage the S19 process and improve the Council's LLFA statutory response. **£147k**
- An additional resource approved from contingency to make immediate progress with implementation of the recommendations in the 2019 Northwich S19 report, and urgently conduct the high number of new flood investigations associated with Storm Christoph. **£50k**
- The Council committed funds at its 25/02/21 meeting from its Capital programme to support schemes which will help the borough recover from the flooding and implement recommendations made in the S19 reports. **£250k**

KC went through the table of affected areas resulting from Storm Christoph with 28 separate areas across the borough where flooding had occurred with 19 of those areas where internal flooding to properties had occurred. The initial programme is to commence the onsite investigation in sets of 3 locations depending on complexity of land ownership and knowledge of the existing drainage infrastructure/assets.

Investigation area 1 – Hooton Green, Hooton, Blacon including Parkgate Road, Chester and Ashton Hayes.

Investigation area 2 – Tattenhall, Saughall and Willaston

Investigation area 3 – Kelsall, Upton, Farndon, Northwich, Little Leigh and Crowton and Antrobus.

Site meetings have been taking place with Atkins and the affected property owners to capture as much information as possible relating to the flooding event. These meetings are currently ongoing. Cllr Roberts mentioned that the site visit for Farndon was held on 15/07/21 and unfortunately, he did not know about this date. Both David Brown and Claire Nicholls from the EA did attend and spoke to some property owners about where the flooding came in and they are waiting for some more data from other property owners.

4. Member Discussion the open Questions from the public 15mins (Prior Notice Required)

Cllr Naylor asked about the 20 tonnes of silt in Ashton Hayes and where does that silt come from and would this have an impact on the flooding? KC, inside the pipe and AC said it most likely been washed in from the storm. Cllr Naylor, no agreement on silt and dredging and considered by David Brown from the EA that dredging would not have an effect on flooding at Northwich. It lends to the argument of dredging is still an issue and needs to be brought into the equation. KC, the group as a whole have to think what are the outcomes from, it was raised with the CRT and EA previously and we need to present the facts to both CRT and EA and see what comes out and what we want to report back to Cabinet. The issue of dredging will be included in the report back to Cabinet, but what we say must be factual and all views will be considered. Cllr Shore, it is fair to say that we are waiting for further information from CRT.

It was agreed that KC would follow up on some outstanding emails and requests for information from CRT. This is not a new action, as previous actions (13 and 19) both relate to KC contacting CRT.

Andrew Needham on behalf of the NFPG highlighted the need for 3 pumps/sumps in Northwich Town Centre and where should these pumps go? The pumps previously were located in Waitrose car park and a study that Andrew has done said it would be better located at the Bull-Ring, even if there is only one pump. KC, basically a sump is a hole in the ground that you can put hoses to. Locations of sumps must be in a low spot, we are looking at Dane Bridge by Waitrose car park. Waitrose car park and Bull-Ring both flood, there is need for facts/evidence of where to put the pumps. We are working with the EA to bring in temporary pumping plans and link this into the

Emergency Plan. There are approximately 60 businesses within Northwich Town Centre and letters are going out to these businesses. We will be gathering as much information as we can which will form part of the S19. Cllr Naylor, we were on the ground in 2019 and 2021 and you can see the water coming up from the manhole by the Solicitors, then spreads onto Waitrose. If you tackle the lowest point as KC mentioned and pump and be a bit more successful and understand the concept. Cllr Shore suggested it may be worth doing a Members Briefing.

FRAG ACTION 21 – KC to draft a Members Briefing.

5. **Flood Resilience & Insurance**

KC highlighted information surrounding flood resilience and insurance that can be found within the Floodhub website. Within there is a knowledge hub with embedded PDF's relating to insurance and business flood planning. CN from the EA said this is a one stop shop funded from the RFCC with local authorities' information in there. There is a toolkit for households and businesses and what you can do before during and after a flood. It was agreed that we would look at sending documents separately or link to the website. The link to the website is <https://thefloodhub.co.uk/>

6. **Members Discussion the open Questions from the public 15mins (Prior Notice Required)**

Cllr Deynem asked if this information was available for everybody and the answer is Yes with the website address above.

7. **Funding Streams**

KC went through funding streams and reiterated what was in the Cabinet paper, justification of flood alleviation schemes comes from DEFRA and the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLA). There are other funding streams such as the local levy which is based on Council tax Band D properties. Cllr Shore – the amount of increase in levy is decided by regional and sub-regional and then ultimately decided by the RFCC, which Cllr Matt Bryan sits on. Access to the levy funding is competitive and prioritised using modelling. CT from the EA mentioned that there is review of the levy and use best evidence available for access of levy and quick win approach. Cllr Shore asked is the review local or national level? Cllr Shore: there was talk of a notional review or small rural villages where the business cases didn't

meet many of the criteria due to limited numbers who were affected. Small scale schemes are better for local neighbourhoods. CT, for frequently flooded communities the numbers rarely stacked up.

8. Member Discussion the open Questions from the public 15mins (Prior Notice Required)

Cllr Naylor was coming under increased pressure from the businesses in Northwich who have been flooded twice now. Why has the 2019 S19 taken so long? 7 months down the line where are we up to on the 2021 report? What have we learned? The businesses needed tangible evidence that we have reacted. They needed comfort that we are acting.

Cllr Shore, there was still work ongoing to access national funding. The issues were not going to be forgotten. KC, there were a lot of interventions ongoing and we must do what our resources allow. Will also need a bigger investment for the bigger schemes. In Northwich the system was large and complex, we need to understand what is coming into Northwich. The modelling exercise will do this and should list what can be done upstream, storage, reed bed flood management etc. There would be a cost for the proposals and national funding would most likely be required and we are building the case where we can.

Cllr Naylor, we are working as fast as we can. It would be good to get something out possibly via the BID to say that we understand their issues and some assurance surrounding flooding. Do they really care about us? Cllr Shore, we would take this forward with the BID.

AN, Northwich has flooded twice in the last two years with 60 businesses affected. We needed to understand what the £100m of funding that the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee will be spent on. His view was that a business case for Northwich would score highly. The EA had made claims against their £7m alleviation scheme but this had failed? Was there an obligation on the EA to come forward with funding?

Cllr Shore: Cllr Bryan is aware of what our 'ask' is from the RFCC National Committee. KC was due to attend. AN, could the public attend? KC didn't know as it wasn't his meeting. AN, happy for KC and Cllr Bryan to take it on. AN asked was the levy voluntary? Cllr Shore, No our contribution was based on the number of band D properties in the borough. Cllr Shore also sat on the committee and it links with Cllr Bryan through the climate change initiatives.

9. Engagement

KC, went through the note on the engagement.

Member Discussion then open Questions from the public 15 mins (Prior Notice Required)

Cllr Shore opened questions to the group on engagement and asked would a member briefing be useful? Cllr Roberts, it would be useful if ward Members could be involved in community engagement so they can act as an interface. Could this be routine in the future? What was the criteria for Parish Councils to be involved? KC, that was a fair comment, not all areas were parished and some Parish Councils were proactive with drainage matters. We had also not proactively contacted all parties. Cllr Roberts, if they were not asked how do they know? Cllr Shore agreed and asked could we reach out to the parishes via the Association of Cheshire Parish Councils (ChALC) KC confirmed that we be discussing drainage at the ChALC meeting in September and we wanted to engage with Parish Councils.

KC, we did want to know about any flooding in their parish contingency flood plans and engage more. Cllr Roberts, would have been interested to be invited to the Farndon site meeting. CN, a lot of Parish Councils had provided the debrief forms. Claire also had details for groups to establish flood action groups. Cllr Shore, mentioned people could contact Claire from the EA directly.

10. United Utilities response to FRAG Action 16 – for note and comment

KC mentioned the specific questions that were raised by Bill Briggs and KC was content with UU's response. If any group members want to raise anything relating to this action, they are feedback to KC. AN, Bill Briggs may want to raise a few issues such as pumps to be brought in earlier when the flood defences are put up. KC, UU had pumping capacity at the start of Storm Christoph. Storm Christoph was a 1:100 storm event, the EA barriers did work and would have been a lot worse if the barriers were not deployed.

11. Approval of forward works programme

KC went through the forward works programme. Meeting number 6 was this meeting with the next meeting looking at future workload and to start drafting the recommendations to Cabinet. The Cabinet paper will include some of the interim

reports from Atkins which is scheduled for November time but will try and get this sooner. KC highlighted to the group that we are not in control of the RMA's getting information back and therefore it is difficult to get exact timeline. Cllr Roberts, at one of the earlier FRAG meetings the priority was the major flooding in Northwich and Acton Bridge and then look at the less dramatic areas of the flooding. Cllr Shore understands that this a task and finish group, but we could meet a couple of more times before the November Cabinet meeting. It was agreed that we would continue in the autumn with another couple of meetings.

12. **Any Other Business**

a) Date and time of next meeting - Summer recess, date to be confirmed.

It was agreed that at the next meeting we would look more at the flooding issues around Farndon, Hooton, etc and keep Storm Christoph flooding updated.