

Derry City and Strabane District Council

Special Meeting of Derry City and Strabane District Council held in the Guildhall, Derry on Wednesday 27 June 2018 at 4.00 pm.

Present: - Members of the Committee - Councillor Boyle (Chair); Aldermen M Hamilton, Hussey and McClintock,; Councillors Cooper, Duffy, Fleming, Hastings, Jackson, McGinley, M McHugh, McKeever and Warke.

In Attendance:- Mr J Kelpie (Chief Executive) and Mrs D McDonnell (Lead Assurance Officer); Miss L Bell (Committee Services Assistant)

Representing Statutory Agencies:- Mr R McCartney (Department of Infrastructure Roads), Mr J McKee (Department of Infrastructure Rivers), Mr S Cullinan (Loughs Agency), Ms J McCaffrey (Regional Co-Ordinator for Government Contingency), Ms J Campbell and Ms J Doherty (Western Health Trust), Ms J McKenna (Red Cross) and Mr Jackson (Northern Ireland Executive Office).

SC27/18 Notice and Summons of Meeting

The Chief Executive read the Notice and Summons for the Meeting.

SC28/18 Member Attendance and Apologies

The Chief Executive completed the roll call. Apologies were received from Aldermen R Hamilton, Kerrigan, Ramsey, Thompson and Councillors Campbell, Carr, Donnelly, C Kelly, Logue, Reilly and Tierney.

SC29/18 Declarations of Members Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

SC30/18 Suspension of Standing orders

Councillor Duffy proposed a suspension of Standing Orders, to allow MLA's to participate in the Meeting for the discussion on the update on flooding to the Derry City and Strabane Council Area in August 2017.

Councillor Duffy moved, Seconded by Alderman McClintock

That Standing Orders be suspended to allow MLA's to be seated in the Council Chamber and to participate in

the discussion on the flooding which took place within Derry and Strabane Council area in August 2017.

The vote was unanimous in support of the proposal. The proposal was therefore carried.

SC31/18 Update on North West Flooding August 2017 from Relevant Agencies

The Lead Assurance Officer presented the above item and advised that the purpose of the Meeting was to update Members on the work which was ongoing since the regional flooding of August 2017.

Councillor M McHugh joined the meeting at this point.

The Mayor advised that representatives from the relevant agencies such as the Western Health Trust, the Department of Infrastructure (Roads and Rivers), the Northern Ireland Executive Office, the Red Cross and the Loughs Agency were present to update Members.

Mr McKee, Department of Infrastructure (DFI) Rivers addressed Council. He advised that he was providing an overview of processes that had taken place since he last addressed Council in relation to flooding on 14 December 2017. He referred to a review which DFI Rivers had published on the 27 March 2018, highlighting that work had commenced on 7 of the 14 recommendations made in the review. He added that repairs had been carried out on 3 kilometres of flood defences.

He advised that one of the key findings within the review was the relevance of the partnership between DFI Rivers and developers during the planning process, stating that this was both valuable and necessary and should continue. He outlined that pre- feasibility studies were taking place in the Drumahoe and Eglinton areas to evaluate the costs and benefits of investment to infrastructure which should be completed in early 2019. He commented that viable works were also being considered for other areas within the city region.

He also advised that a recommendation had been made surrounding the support which can be provided by the emergency services. He commented that an online portal would be developed which would enable flooding calls to be viewed in real time as they were made. He stated that he felt there was evident confusion on the function

responsibilities of government departments and stated that a website would be constructed to clarify these this to the public.

He remarked on the level of community resilience within the Drumahoe and Eglinton areas and the importance of the engagement of elected Members within these communities. He also commented on the role which the Red Cross played within harnessing volunteer support in an emergency situation.

Mr McCartney, DFI Roads advised that during the August 2017 floods 200 roads were damaged, 60 roads were closed immediately and 89 bridges were damaged. He also advised that to date all 60 roads had been reopened with the exception of Ballynameen and Glenrandel Bridges.

He explained that design work on Ballynameen Bridge had commenced immediately after the floods and that after the procurement and approval processes had been completed (including DFI structural and DFI technical approvals) the contract was awarded to FP McCann in February 2018. He advised that outside approvals had taken 8 weeks to obtain, which had a knock on effect on the timeline. He continued that the works were being carried out at present with a completion date of 28 September 2018.

In relation to Glenrandel Bridge, Mr McCartney advised that complexity and constraints existed surrounding the listed status of the bridge, the salmon population and conservation. He explained that DFI Roads had been liaising with the Historical Environment Division, the Northern Ireland Environment Division and the Loughs Agency on the design and access statement for the bridge. He also acknowledged that work on the site would be restricted during October to May. He stated that he would like work to commence before the next financial year.

Alderman McClintock thanked the representatives from the DFI for the update and asked for clarification on where the 3 kilometres of flood defences had been repaired. She referred to issues outside of the review and questioned if a reason other than heavy rain had been identified for the flooding. She asked for clarification on how the decisions for the classification of flood plains were made, as many members of the public were finding it difficult to obtain insurance because of this. She also asked for information on how insurance costs could be lowered.

Alderman Hamilton referred to a bridge in Claudy which had been closed and requested a completion date for this bridge as she was worried about the impact this could have on local businesses. She also questioned if a rates rebate or compensation for loss of earnings could be applied for by business owners in this area and queried why the gullies had not been able to deal with the flood water in the August flooding incident.

Councillor Hastings questioned if there were plans to reinstall Donnybrewer Pump Station after it was severely damaged in the floods.

Alderman Warke stated that he felt that the delay in completing the repairs at Ballnameen Bridge was due to the completion of unnecessary bureaucracy and that he felt the increase in delays seemed to be ongoing. He questioned what actions had been put in place to make the process of repair easier in the future.

Councillor Fleming requested clarification on the role of DFI Rivers in regard to planning guidance, feasibility studies and mitigation on the likelihood of flooding.

Alderman Hussey queried what reports had been compiled in relation to the impact of flooding in the Newtonstewart, Plumbridge and Donemana areas.

In response to Councillor Hussey, Mr McKee clarified that although the review tackled the Drumahoe and Eglinton areas specifically, action was also on-going in the areas he had mentioned. In response to Councillor Fleming, he commented on the implications of planning guidance for Council as the Planning department was now the remit of Council. He referred to Planning Policy Statement 15 and the Local Development Plan stating that had it not been for such robust pieces of planning policy, the outcome of the flooding could have been much worse. In relation to the process he clarified that when a plan was submitted Planning Officers checked if the proposed site if proposed site was on a flood plain using a map issue by the Rivers service. If it was deemed so, consultation would then take place with DFI Rivers. He also advised that the advice from DFI Rivers would be to refrain from building on a flood plain or behind flood defences because of the residual risk.

In response to Councillor Hasting's query, Mr McKee stated that he was unaware of the situation at Donnybrewer but undertook to investigate and contact him accordingly.

In response to Alderman McClintock, Mr McKee clarified that the cause of the flooding had been extreme rainfall and that no infrastructure collapse or negligence had led to the flooding. He stated that the information in the report highlighted the vast level that the rivers rose. In reference to the classification of floodplains, he stated that the recalibration of floodplains was highly likely and that their extent may now be greater than that previously. He also made Members aware of Flood Re, a flood re-insurance scheme which would provide those affected by flooding access to affordable insurance levels.

He informed Members that a capital investment paper was being compiled to increase the amount of investment that could be put into infrastructure to insure the need for improvement that the review identified was met and advised that restructuring was taking place so that this could be delivered at a faster pace.

In response to Alderman M Hamilton, Mr McCartney explained that work was taking place on Claudy Bridge at present and that he was reasonably confident that this would be completed by September 2018. In relation to rate relief, he advised that he could not comment as this was the remit of Land and Property Services. He further advised that contractors had been employed to clear gullies immediately after the floods and it was policy that these are cleared annually. He commented that gullies were not designed to cope with the level of rainfall which occurred in August and levels were deemed to be exceptional.

In reply to Alderman Warke, Mr McCartney stated that the Roads Service had to work within legislation and policy frameworks which unfortunately contributed to the delay in commencement of works at Ballynameen Bridge.

Mr Middleton, MLA commented that he was currently dealing with issues arising from the floods. He welcomed the review from DFI and said there were lessons to be learned. He welcomed the establishment of a website to signpost information, stating that this was needed sooner rather than later, as people were living in fear. He raised concerns over the availability of sandbags stating that although this was a simple issue it needed to be resolved. He made reference to a farmer who had not received payment for his contribution to the emergency response efforts, stating that this was concerning as it conveyed the message that people would not be reimbursed for their expenses.

Mr Middleton thanked all the organisations and volunteers for their support during this difficult situation, he particularly mentioned the late Marie Callen from the Housing Executive for her work under significant pressure to rehouse families.

Alderman McClintock stated that she gained no comfort in knowing that floodplains were now more extensive and questioned why out of two houses next door to each other in Ivy Mead, that one could be classified as being on a floodplain whilst the neighbouring house was not. She mentioned the impact floodplains had on insurance costs for the persons affected particularly business owners in the Glendermott Valley Business Park and asked for suggestions on flood defences that could be added to reduce insurance costs. She also commented that she was used to transparency with Council which she didn't feel the Department of Infrastructure had provided in this case and queried how the information on the Flood Re insurance scheme had been communicated.

In response, Mr McKee explained that floodplains had been re-evaluated in 2013 and were scheduled to be re-evaluated again in 2019, however due to the recent flooding incidents he was trying to have this process accelerated. He stated that the Flood Re scheme was launched a few years ago and there had been a public engagement event to introduce it. He added that he would be happy to share information on this with Council. He stated that he was not familiar with the Glendermott Valley Business Park in particular and was unsure what action business owners could take to reduce their insurance costs.

Alderman McClintock rephrased her question regarding what action the Department of Infrastructure could which would lead to a reduction in insurance costs for business owners.

Mr McKee stated that a feasibility study of the area was scheduled to take place next year to determine what flood defences would be viable for the entire area. He also indicated that all breaches of the rivers during the flooding had now been repaired.

Alderman McClintock stated the timelines of these changes was not satisfying home and business owners.

In response, Mr McKee said that the Department of Infrastructure was doing everything possible to accelerate these processes. He also commented that the clear resilience of the communities had motivated the Department to do all they could.

In response to Mr Middleton's question, Mr McCartney stated that the payment to the farmer who had not been paid for his contribution to emergency efforts had been processed last week and suggested that Mr Middleton contact him if this had not been received. Mr Middleton agreed to do this and left the Meeting at this point.

In response to a question from Alderman Hussey, Mr McKee explained that the Department for Infrastructure provided advice to the Heads of Planning from each Council furthermore a specific Officer had been appointed for this purpose. He stated that he felt the floods would have had a greater impact had planning policy been more relaxed.

In response to a question from Councillor Hastings, Mr McCartney clarified that main routes were prioritised for repair due to budget restrictions and whilst the Department would do their best to maintain more secondary country roads they would have a lesser priority than major routes. On further questioning from Councillor Hastings he clarified that secondary roads would be inspected and repaired accordingly if defects were noted.

The Mayor thanked Mr McKee and Mr McCartney for their updates.

Ms McCaffery, the Regional Co-Ordinator for Government Contingency addressed Council. She explained that she had been given responsibility for no.4 of the 14 recommendations of the DFI Rivers review, although she had been involved of the majority of the 14. She explained she had responsibility for the management of volunteers and praised the response of volunteers including the Red Cross who had provided assistance at a local level. She stated that a Community Response Recovery Forum had been established to identify needs in the community, to identify any gaps and to help the community work better together in the future. She also indicated that she was responsible for information sharing. She identified that the GDPR regulations had been a challenge but that she was determined to ensure that it did not hinder any sharing of vital information. In reference to financial assistance, she stated that there had been limitations on the eligibility criteria for claiming financial assistance after the floods and that she hoped that this deadline would be extended. In reference to regional emergency planning exercise's she stated that these would be used for the validation and revising of emergency protocols and plans in the future.

Ms Doherty (Western Health Trust) stated that she had been onsite at the time of the flooding and outlined that support had been available to those affected by the flood through the gateway teams, the older people team and the mental health teams. She outlined that out of hours help was available through the 24 hour helpline (life line) and the emergency social work team. She explained that her team had also signposted children and young people to assistance available from local youth clubs and community centres and had signposted those in financial difficulties to Dove House and the Citizen's Advice Centre. She commented that the response from the Western Health Trust had been proportionate and had taken into account the trauma that those affected by the flooding had dealt with and that some of the people involved were only now dealing with the emotion of what had happened to them.

Ms Campbell (Emergency Planning, Western Health Trust) commented that a list signposting all the support available to the community in dealing with issues arising from flood had been compiled and circulated. She advised that this could be circulated to Members again if required. She also advised Members that the Western Health Trust had an emergency response process in place to ensure an appropriate response in these situations.

In response to Alderman Hussey, Ms Doherty stated that whilst she didn't have exact figures on the number of calls received she felt that people were content with the service offered, that no one was unhappy and that no complaints had been received.

In response a query from Councillor M McHugh, Ms Doherty stated that information and support was available to all within the Council area and could be distributed as far and as wide as needed.

Mr Cullinan (Loughs Agency) stated that within the Loughs Agency his remit was fishery stock and habitat. He identified the immediate impact the flooding had to landowners with water over-spilling from rivers onto their land and he explained that the Loughs Agency had been awarded £500,000 for the benefit of fishery landowners. He outlined that this funding would be used to conduct walkover habitat surveys and repair fencing which he hoped would be carried out within the next 6 weeks. He also stated that he did not feel that this funding would cover all the work which was needed to be done and that the Loughs Agency would be re-applying to DAERA for more funding if this was needed. He emphasised the partnership the Loughs Agency would have with DFI Roads and Rivers in completing this work, he emphasised

the work which needed completed within the Glenelly Valley, adding that this did not receive the support which the Faughan and Burndennet areas had received. He concluded that he hoped to have this work finished by the end of the year.

In response to Alderman Hussey, Mr Cullinan confirmed that invasive plant species such Japanese Knotweed had been identified in the Council area. He also confirmed that rainbow trout, which could have become a threat to wild species had escaped from fish farms as a direct result of the flooding. However these fish had moved downstream and were open to predation. He confirmed that monthly surveys would be carried out to monitor this.

Ms McKenna (Red Cross) addressed Council. She thanked all the relevant agencies for sharing their updates on the ongoing issues. She stated that her interest was in the humanitarian impact of the flooding which happened nearly one year ago and commended Officers for the way they continued to liaise with communities.

She stated that the average time to recover from an incident like this was between 12 and 18 months and commented that she is starting to see this happening in the North West. She also commented that for some people re-entry into the home could be difficult and that many were frightened and in shock.

She stated that everyone had a role to play in helping people deal with these situations including community organisations and churches. She urged everyone involved to remain observant, supportive and empathetic. She highlighted that people needed spaces in which they were given the opportunity to tell their story and advised that the key feelings that communities had raised at community meetings were those of anger and frustration.

Ms McKenna highlighted the need for community partnerships and noted the establishment of a regional resilience group where it had been agreed to develop an action plan to tackle issues that were raised. She added that simple, user friendly information was needed in a variety of channels on a number of issues given that not everyone had access to the internet. She referred to the town of Keswick in Cumbria which used a community newsletter to update residents. She used this an example of the type of communication which she felt would be effective in the North West.

She emphasised that good recovery was more than rehabilitation or restoration but required 'building back better'. She indicated that the one thing everyone affected had in common was the fear of an incident like this happening again. She stated that this was not a guarantee she could give but that measures could be taken to reduce fear and have more control if a similar situation were to occur. She added that the lessons learnt through meetings and working with the people affected, should go into best practise.

In response to a query from Alderman Hussey, Ms McKenna re-confirmed that the average recovery time from such an incident was 12 to 18 months .She added that there were a small number of people who face further difficulties in rebuilding their lives and referred to the need to be aware of this. She also confirmed that the Red Cross were part of a working group for farmers and rural communities who had been affected in the Fermanagh and Omagh areas.

The Mayor thanked all for their attendance at the Meeting, including Mr Jackson from the Northern Ireland Executive Office.

The meeting ended at 5.30 pm