

Scrutiny Committee – 9th October 2008

10. Flooding - response to the Pitt Review

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Purpose of the Report

Recent rainfall events have highlighted various issues to do with flooding and, perhaps more particularly, the District Council's role and response with regard to emergency assistance. The Council's Scrutiny Committee has accordingly asked for the matter to be included on their agenda for discussion.

Action Required

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to note and comment on the report.

Report

There are currently a number of inter-related issues under consideration and these are, principally:

1. The Pitt Review

Following the severe flooding events that occurred in the summer of 2007, Sir Michael Pitt was tasked by the government to produce a report to assess those events and to make recommendations for improving the UK's resilience to future severe flooding. Following an extensive consultation and evidence collection process, the Pitt Review team produced an interim report in November 2007 and a final report, '**Learning the Lessons from the 2007 Floods**', in June 2008. This can be viewed at <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/thepittreview.aspx>.

Summary of Review - An initial analysis of the report and its recommendations are summarised as follows:

The report identified six basic areas of concern:

- knowing where and when it will flood
- reducing the risk of flooding and its impact
- being rescued and cared for during an emergency
- maintaining power and water supplies and protect essential services
- better advice & help for people to protect their families and homes
- staying healthy & speeding up recovery

In addition, the report contains 92 specific recommendations for action by local authorities, central government, the Environment Agency, emergency services, utilities and the general public. Each recommendation proposes a lead agency. 'Local authorities' are required to "lead" on 21 of these recommendations and are expected to have a role to play in meeting many others. Pitt proposes an implementation plan to deliver these recommendations by 2010.

Government response to the Pitt Review - The government is committed to prepare a detailed response to the report, with a prioritised action plan, and this is due by the end

of the year. In advance of the response, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, Hilary Benn, has welcomed the report and its direction and has announced funding to implement some of Pitt's recommendations, including:

- £5 million to develop Surface Water Management Plans in the highest priority areas.
- £1 million for mapping work to improve reservoir safety.
- £250,000 for a national floods exercise.
- Earmarking at least £34.5 million of the £2.15 billion flood and coastal erosion budget for the next 3 years to implement Pitt recommendations.

2. Emergency Response

One of the most useful outcomes of the Pitt Review will be to look at how prepared any of the agencies and authorities were for the type of flooding experienced this year. Councils and other organisations are tasked with reviewing the effectiveness of multi-agency responses, mutual aid arrangements, communication and media handling. Clarification is needed in order to identify who is taking the lead role in flooding emergencies, what responsibilities each agency has and how these roles and responsibilities can be better co-ordinated and communicated to the public, business and media. In its response to the Pitt Review the Local Government Association believes that local authorities, through their Local Strategic Partnerships and Local Area Agreements, are often ideally placed to take the lead role in co-ordinating the response in flooding emergencies.

For many years South Somerset District Council's policy with regard to emergency assistance and flood alleviation has been very positive and already embraces many of the Pitt Review recommendations. Some concerns have however been recognised in respect of the emergency sandbag provision in that, in times of widespread flooding, there can sometimes be logistical problems in responding to calls for assistance. The policy and arrangements have been under review for some time with one of the principal aims being to promote more public awareness about flood risk and to offer advice to individual property owners about what they might be able to do to protect their property e.g. installation of flood-boards. To this end, arrangements are currently in hand for a series of locally based 'Flood Awareness' workshops commencing, provisionally, in November 2008. This public awareness initiative is very much in line with recommendations from the Pitt Review.

RECOMMENDATION 60. The Government should implement a public information campaign which draws on a single definitive set of flood prevention and mitigation advice for householders and businesses, and which can be used by media and the authorities locally and nationally.

3. Climate Change

There is little doubt that, through whatever cause, the climate and weather patterns are changing. This is, of course, recognised in the Pitt Review and, as a result, the Local Government Association has set up a Climate Change Commission to explore how local government can respond more effectively to it – on both mitigation and adaptation. The Commission will report its findings in December but in its interim report it highlighted the importance of councils considering the impact of trend climate change and the higher risk of extreme weather events for the resilience of their areas, services and infrastructure. More recently, it has noted the changing approach to flood risk from the insurance sector and is concerned about the impact this will have on communities where insurance premiums are likely to increase significantly or where cover may be difficult to secure.

4. Floods and Water Bill

Following the Pitt Review and the Government's Water Strategy, *Future Water*, the Government has announced a draft Floods and Water Bill for consultation in 2009. During July Defra launched two further documents in response to the floods: *Consultation on policy options for promoting property-level flood protection and resilience* and, jointly with the Environment Agency, *Towards a New National Flood Emergency Framework*. These are just the latest of a whole series of consultation and advisory documents to do with flooding issues that have been issued in recent years.

The 'Floods and Water Bill' is apparently set to radically change the current legislation to do with flooding and drainage and associated responsibilities. It will hopefully clarify a number of irregularities and address confusion that currently exists.

Background papers: *'Learning the Lessons from the 2007 Floods'*
Government's Water Strategy, Future Water
