

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

HELD REMOTELY

THURSDAY, 25TH JUNE 2020 (6PM)

Present:

Councillors: M J Hart (Chairman), S J Chambers (Vice-Chairman), N J Desmond, C Edginton-White, S Griffiths, S Miah, T L Onslow, M Rayner, S E N Rook and D R Sheppard.

Observers

Councillors: G W Ballinger, J F Byng, V Caulfield, R H Coleman, P Dyke, I Hardiman, P Harrison, N Martin and C Rogers.

OS.10 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

OS.11 Appointment of Substitutes

No substitutes were appointed.

OS.12 Declarations of Interests by Members

No declarations of interest were made.

The Chairman welcomed everybody to the meeting. He explained that the purpose of the meeting was an opportunity for the Environment Agency representatives to set the scene, give their evidence and for members to scrutinise and ask questions. He said it was important that the Committee did not jump to any conclusions before all of the evidence had been heard.

He thanked the representatives from the Environment Agency for making time to come to the meeting and for providing a very comprehensive written report.

OS.13 Consideration of the flooding motion from Council – Evidence Gathering from the Environment Agency

The Committee received a detailed report from Dave Throup, Area Manager Herefordshire and Worcestershire and Charles Chandler, West Midlands Strategic Flood Recovery Manager.

Councillor R Coleman joined the meeting at 6.15pm.

Councillor V Caulfield joined the meeting at 6.17pm and left at 6.42pm.

Dave Throup thanked the Committee for the invitation to the meeting. He said that

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the significant flood events over the winter of 2019/20 had been a huge incident, not only for the Environment Agency, but for multi agency partners too. He said that the Environment Agency welcomed local scrutiny both of its actions and of the multi agency response to the flooding which was very considerable indeed.

The Committee received a high level overview of the report which provided detailed information and data on flood forecasting; the Bewdley Severn Side barrier deployment in February 2020; property flood resilience measures at Beales Corner; flood risk Government funding mechanism; the options for a permanent scheme for Beales Corner and the lessons learnt.

Dave Throup spoke about the spectre of climate change. He said that you can never escape the events of the rainfall that occurred over the winter, which were not necessarily the result of climate change; it could just be part of the natural variability in the climate. However it was exactly the sort of thing that was expected to be seen in the future as the world was warming and the atmosphere was becoming more turbulent. He said that the Environment Agency was working locally to determine what this effect would have on larger rivers such as the Severn. He said that over the next 30 years it was predicted that flood peaks upstream of Worcester would be 0.6-0.8m higher than those currently experienced. Therefore it was an important issue to bear in mind.

In relation to the deployment of the barriers in Bewdley. Dave Throup paid tribute to the Environment Agency Field Operations Team for all their hard work and for not taking unnecessary risks during the events.

The Committee fully scrutinised the report. After each section Dave Throup and Charles Chandler engaged in a question and answer session with members.

Councillor T Onslow left the meeting at 7.26pm.

Councillor P Dyke left the meeting at 7.42pm.

At 7.57pm the Committee unanimously agreed to suspend Council Procedure Rules (Standing Orders) 1.1 (iii) to allow the meeting to continue past 8pm.

Councillor N Martin left the meeting at 7.58pm.

In conclusion, Dave Throup advised the Committee that there were lessons to be learnt after every single flood event. He said the Environment Agency learn both internally and through multi-agency debriefs. The scale and magnitude of lots of different things coming together had made the winter floods a particularly complex series of events. He added that the normal de-briefing procedures and review procedures had commenced, however the Covid-19 pandemic had made things extremely difficult.

He said that a number of local de-briefs had been undertaken and a multi agency Worcestershire review was scheduled to be held, which would be chaired by either the Police or the Fire and Rescue Authority. This would allow all agencies to share their experiences and allow learning to be implemented. The review would look at the wider geography along the River Severn.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked Dave Throup and Charles

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Chandler for attending the meeting and for answering the questions in a very open, honest and candid way.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 8.12pm.