

*Executive*

*9<sup>th</sup> February 2017*

**Report of the Director of Economy & Place  
Portfolio of the Executive Member for Environment**

**City of York Council Response to the Independent Flood Inquiry**

**Summary**

1. The flooding in late December 2015 followed an intense period of rainfall across November and December due to the impacts of Storms Desmond and Eva. Record river levels were observed in many river catchments across the north of England. More than 4000 homes and 2000 businesses flooded across Yorkshire with 453 properties and 174 businesses flooded in York.
2. Council leadership called for an independent inquiry to investigate the causes and impacts of the floods, the York Flood Inquiry was set up in April 2016 chaired by Ms Angharad Davies and supported by Mr Tom Toole and Mr Laurence Waterhouse. The terms of reference for the inquiry can be seen in Annex 1.
3. The Inquiry Panel have held public meetings, received over 50 written submissions, issued questionnaires to flooded residents and businesses and consulted widely with all agencies. The full inquiry report can be seen at the below link:  
  
[https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/12456/york\\_flood\\_inquiry\\_main\\_report](https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/12456/york_flood_inquiry_main_report)
4. The inquiry has made 90 recommendations, these can be seen in Annex 2 of this report.
5. We welcome the findings and recommendations of this report, it has drawn a range of conclusions on the cause of flooding and the impacts that occurred, the council support the key findings of the report namely:

- a. Flooding was caused by record flows on the River Foss which overwhelmed the Foss Barrier, the work that has begun on the Foss Barrier is essential to manage future flood risks in the River Foss basin
  - b. Levels on the River Ouse were the second highest on record, the extent of flooding on the River Ouse was managed through the provision of existing flood defences but future investment is needed to ensure these defences can manage future risks, and those areas that remain undefended require further work
  - c. A sustained and committed response was given by all authorities, however, a range of recommendations are made to illustrate how communications, plans and procedures can be improved to manage future events and better involve wider groups and volunteers
6. The recommendations listed in Annex 2 of this report have been initially considered by City of York Council. A range of debriefs have already been carried out by CYC following the Boxing Day floods and a rolling action plan had already been developed to take forward recommendations and lessons learnt. The existing action plan has been updated to highlight how existing CYC work is already progressing many of the 90 recommendations made by the inquiry, this can be seen in Annex 3. Further work is required to update the CYC plan to cover all agreed CYC recommendations and ensure all partners have considered the actions within their plans.
7. CYC are working closely with the Environment Agency to deliver a range of localised improvements to the cities flood defences, this work – the York Five Year Plan – has been developed following the floods and is supported by Government investment. In addition to this we are working with the EA on a catchment scale study to identify opportunities for wider interventions across the River Ouse catchment to further reduce future flood risks, this work will be developed for a formal consultation in Spring 2017.
8. The resources and governance structures required to deliver these projects are key to their successful implementation. The recommended approach to deliver the Five Year Plan is provided at Annex 4, the wider catchment work will require a similar approach but this will need to be embedded through a wider set of agencies

and cross border working will need to be reinforced and formalised. This will be brought for wider agreement at a later date.

## **Recommendations**

9. City of York Council accepts the work carried out by the York Flood Inquiry team and will work with partners to review and understand its findings and implement actions to progress the agreed recommendations from the report.

It is recommended that:

- The Inquiry has achieved the aims of the Terms of Reference as laid down in Annex 1 of this report
- City of York Council accepts the output of the report as detailed in the recommendations detailed in Annex 2 of this report
- City of York Council continues to deliver a range of actions following flood debrief sessions, recommendations from the inquiry have been mapped across to these as detailed in Annex 3 of this report. Further work will be carried out to identify wider actions that may be needed to deliver all agreed recommendations
- One off funding is allocated to assess and deliver the agreed recommendations from the inquiry report
- City of York Council continues to commit to close working with the Environment Agency and other partners to deliver the Five Year Plan and the emerging catchment wide solutions work. Annex 4 details the recommended approach to deliver the localised defence improvement work and further work will be brought in a later report to detail the approach to progress catchment wide solutions. It is recommended that the Flood Risk and Asset Manager acts as the council Senior User and the Executive Member for the Environment sits on the Executive Steering Group for this project

Reason – To formally accept the findings of the City of York Council commissioned York Flood Inquiry and identify the approach to develop agreed recommendations from the report. To approve the governance approach for the delivery of the Environment Agency led flood risk management investment programmes.

## **Background**

10. Storms Desmond and Eva caused widespread flooding across northern England in December 2015, record river levels were recorded at many river level monitoring points including the River Foss in York, the River Ouse reached the second highest level on record, the same level as the autumn 2012 flood event.
11. 453 properties and 174 businesses flooded in York and the wider impact of infrastructure and communications resilience affected many who had not been directly flooded.
12. An independent investigation into the causes of and impacts from the floods was initiated by the City of York Council. This report details the initial City of York Council response to this report and its recommendations, links are made to wider debrief sessions that have been held by the council since the floods. Further work is needed to fully understand and respond to all of the 90 recommendations but many of these have already been considered in the actions that have arisen from the debriefs, this report makes links between the existing actions and how they are contributing towards the inquiry's recommendations. Some recommendations in the report will need further consideration as to how they could be delivered before they can be agreed.
13. All risk management authorities and partners need to consider and respond to the findings of the inquiry and further reporting will be developed as necessary based on any responses that are made to the report.

## **Consultation**

14. This report details the work carried out by the York Flood Inquiry and represents City of York Council's initial response to this commission. The Inquiry have carried out a wide range of consultations with agencies and partner organisations involved in flood management, response and recovery and have consulted widely with those affected by the impacts of the Boxing Day floods.

## **Options**

15. As an initial response to the findings of the York Flood Inquiry only one option exists at this stage:

- a. City of York Council accepts the work carried out by the York Flood Inquiry team and will work with partners to review and understand its findings and implement actions to progress the agreed recommendations from the report.

It is recommended that:

- The Inquiry has achieved the aims of the Terms of Reference as laid down in Annex 1 of this report
- City of York Council accepts the output of the report as detailed in the recommendations detailed in Annex 2 of this report
- City of York Council continues to deliver a range of actions following flood debrief sessions, recommendations from the inquiry have been mapped across to these as detailed in Annex 3 of this report. Further work will be carried out to identify wider actions that may be needed to deliver all agreed recommendations
- One off funding is allocated to assess and deliver the agreed recommendations from the inquiry report
- City of York Council continues to commit to close working with the Environment Agency and other partners to deliver the Five Year Plan and the emerging catchment wide solutions work. Annex 4 details the recommended approach to deliver the localised defence improvement work and further work will be brought in a later report to detail the approach to progress catchment wide solutions. It is recommended that the Flood Risk and Asset Manager acts as the council Senior User and the Executive Member for the Environment sits on the Executive Steering Group for this project

## **Council Plan**

16. The York Flood Inquiry has developed an investigation into the causes and effects of the Boxing Day Floods, its recommendations will enable all risk management authorities and partners to develop communications, policies and procedures that are more resilient to future flood risk.

The inquiry supports Council Plan objectives to deliver 'a prosperous city for all' and through its independent process

supported by significant consultation it shows that ‘we are a council that listens to residents’.

## Implications

17. There are no risks and implications associated with this cover report into the initial outputs of the York Flood Inquiry. The recommendations made in the inquiry, once agreed by all partners, will lead to wider work and consultation and implications will be identified at an appropriate stage.

## Contact Details

**Author:**

**Chief Officer Responsible for the report:**

**Steve Wragg  
Flood Risk and Asset  
Manager**

**Neil Ferris  
Director of Economy & Place**

Tel: 01904 553401

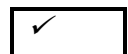
**Report  
Approved**



**Date** 25/01/17

**Wards Affected:**

**All**



**For further information please contact the author of the report**

**Background Papers: York Flood Inquiry report**

[https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/12456/york\\_flood\\_inquiry\\_main\\_report](https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/12456/york_flood_inquiry_main_report)

**Annexes:**

Annex 1 York Flood Inquiry Terms of Reference  
Annex 2 York Flood Inquiry Recommendations  
Annex 3 CYC Boxing Day Flood Action Plan  
Annex 4 York 5 Year Plan Project Governance