

## **Drainage in York– Feasibility Study**

### **Summary**

1. In September 2007 Cllr Richard Moore registered a proposed new scrutiny topic on the subject of drainage in York. A copy of the topic registration form is enclosed at Annex A.

### **Criteria**

2. **Public Interest** – there was media interest after the heavy rain in June 2007, but not the concentrated reporting that followed serious flooding in other parts of Yorkshire. Members must consider whether or not there is still strong public interest in the subject.
3. **Corporate Priorities for Improvement** -This topic does not obviously fit with any of the Corporate Priorities for Improvement – members need to consider what their view is on this.
4. **National, local or regional significance** – incidences of flooding, if severe, could be considered to be of local and regional significance.
5. **Under performance or service dissatisfaction** – after the heavy rains of 25 June there were 46 reports of flooding on the highway, 42 reports of blocked gullies, 12 cases of sandbags being required, 13 reports of flooding almost entering properties and 5 reports of flooding entering properties. There were also reports from seven elected members of incidences of flooding or blocked drains from residents in their wards.
6. **Level of risk** – so far as is known there are no risks which could be alleviated by the investigation of this topic,
7. **Service efficiency** –so far as is known there are no aspects of service efficiency which would benefit from this review being carried out.

## **Consultation**

### **Relevant Member Consultation**

8. Political group leaders and relevant officers were asked to comment on the feasibility of carrying out this scrutiny review.
9. The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group had not responded at the time of writing.
10. The Leader of Labour Group wants to register his sympathy with York residents who have suffered as a result of the flooding, but does have concerns that this scrutiny topic can achieve its objectives. His main concerns are:
  - a. Much of the Scrutiny involves organisations which CYC have no ability to question or influence. They may not co-operate with us productively or even not at all.
  - b. The information he has indicates that the flooding was of such a nature that no matter how good the drainage was it could not have been sufficient to meet the demands that were called upon it on this occasion.
  - c. The proposed scrutiny does not take matters much further than the motion approved at Council on 4 October (see below).
11. The Leader of the Conservative Group is of the opinion that the motion agreed at Council (see below) on 4 October 2007, and the programme of work being carried out by the Drainage Team, already commits CYC to the issues requested in this scrutiny topic registration. There is therefore no requirement for a scrutiny review to be commissioned.
12. The Leader of the Green Group, Cllr Andy d'Agorne, welcomes this proposal.
13. If any further responses are received from the Leaders these will be reported at the meeting.

### **Relevant Officer/External Consultation**

14. The supporting Scrutiny Officer has held discussions with the Head of Engineering Consultancy and his colleagues in City Strategy.
15. They report that the request in this topic registration for an examination of the events of June 2007 is already taking place. In June 2007 the rainfall was

above the design criteria for the sewerage system – it was recorded as the wettest June on record. In many of the weather stations in Yorkshire the rain that fell in June this year was between 300 and 450 per cent of the average rainfall that had fallen in the last 30 years.

16. The exceptionally heavy rain of 24-25 June fell onto ground that was already exceptionally wet. This would affect the ability of the ground to absorb the water and mean more was attempting to enter the sewerage system.
17. This heavy rainfall would result in the potential for flash floods as the amount of water was beyond the design capacity of sewers, becks and watercourses.
18. The Scrutiny topic registration form asks whether the sewers in York are adequate to meet expected increases in demand. Yorkshire Water are responsible for the construction of sewers, and any increase in size would need revised government standards to be produced and then implemented and the financing of this to be agreed.
19. The issue of inter-agency communications and working practices is acknowledged by the Environment Agency as lacking in cohesion. This is as a result of the structure of the water industry which was defined in the deregulation programme several years ago.
20. The Drainage team are, however, in ongoing discussions with all other relevant agencies. They are developing a programme of co-ordinated cleaning of Yorkshire Water's sewers and City of York Council's roads and gullies. There is a good record of joint working between the agencies and the Flood Defence Plan now in force is a result of this joint working.
21. The Drainage team do acknowledge that there may be a case for the education and informing of residents. The Environment Agency do hold a Flood Awareness Week which is connected with river flooding, but there could be a case for informing people about what to do in adverse weather conditions. Decisions would need to be made by the Executive about funding a team from Neighbourhood Services to attend emergency flash flood sites to pump and sandbag.
22. Ray Chaplin, Head of Engineering Consultancy, has agreed to attend this meeting to clarify any queries Members may have about this proposed topic.
23. Members will also be aware that the following motion was approved at Full Council on 4 October 2007:

“Council notes with concern the flooding caused around York this summer as a result of blocked gullies and the drainage systems being unable to cope with the level of rainfall. Council recognises that it has a duty to ensure that all the gullies in the City work to their maximum capacity. This should include not being blocked with detritus or not maintained due to roads or sewers also needing maintenance.

Council firstly calls on CYC Officers to take an urgent review of the Gully Cleaning process in the City and report to Councillors all gullies which are damaged or blocked and need urgent work undertaken. Secondly, that Officers bring forward a scheme to undertake a maintenance program to ensure the situation is not repeated again.

Council calls for the government to introduce a statutory duty on the private water companies to review and upgrade drainage in line with the increased usage of modern life and to investigate future capacity level changes and environmental security of infrastructure, including pumping stations, which may result from climate change.”

### **Conduct of Review**

24. This scrutiny topic registration is requesting that affected residents give evidence as to the problems they experienced and the response they received. It is understood from the Drainage and Highways Infrastructure teams that the location and extent of the problems in June are already well documented.
25. There is also a request for interviews with external agencies as to their responses. Outside organisations cannot be obliged to participate in Scrutiny reviews, however it is understood that ongoing discussions are already taking place with City of York Council officers.
26. The request for seamless working practices within the network is impracticable because of the unpredictability of the events which lead to the drains being full to over-capacity.
27. The request to examine the review being undertaken by CYC’s Drainage team acknowledges that this is taking place, and an additional review may involve a duplication of effort.

### **Implications**

28. The Assistant Director for City Development and Transport is of the opinion that if this scrutiny is to go ahead it will require a manager to support the review over a period of at least 3 months at 50% of his time. The impact of that is work on the subsidised bus and dial and ride contracts will cease and delay occur in delivering these - this will result in criticism for the Council. His opinion is that this scrutiny is premature given that we are currently assembling

an officer review of the events to be submitted to Neighbourhood Services EMAP in due course.

### **Risk Management**

29. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy, there are no known risks associated with the recommendations of this report.

### **Conclusion**

30. On balance, based on the information and evidence gathered in this feasibility report, it is recommended that a review be not proceeded with at the present time. However, if members wish to proceed it would be advisable to focus on:

Whether there is a need for education of residents as to what measures and precautions should be taken by householders in adverse weather situations, if these are possible, practical or advisable.

### **Recommendation**

31. That the review be not proceeded with at the present time given the potential duplication of resources referred to in paragraph 27 above and the prematurity of any review pending the findings emerging from the existing review referred to in paragraph 28.

### **Contact Details**

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Colin Langley  
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Services

**Feasibility Study  
Approved**



**Date** 12.10.07

**Specialist Implications Officer(s)**

None

**Wards Affected:** *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

**All**



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

**Background Papers:** None

**Annexes:**

Annex A – Scrutiny Topic Registration Form