

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD

20 October 2008

Report of the Director of Planning Transport and Leisure and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Transportation

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 THE PITT REVIEW – LEARNING LESSONS FROM THE 2007 FLOODS

Summary

The report gives initial consideration to the recent report by Sir Michael Pitt reviewing the summer 2007 floods, commissioned by the government, and its implications for the Borough Council.

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The period May to July 2007 was the wettest since records began for most of England and Wales. On a regional basis, the rainfall was typically twice the average for that period. More locally however, in places such as South Yorkshire, Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire, the rainfall was roughly four times the average.
- 1.1.2 Unfortunately the effects of the rainfall were no less extraordinary and circa 49,000 households and 7000 businesses were flooded. Flooding occurred from rivers, notably the Don, Severn and Thames, where defences were overwhelmed and from the inability of drainage systems to cope with the volume of water such as at Hull. The vulnerability of critical infrastructure was highlighted by the events at Walham electricity switching station and Mythe Water Treatment Works. Structural damage to the Ulley reservoir dam led to the evacuation of around 1000 people from downstream villages and the closure of the M1. The emergency response to the floods and the recovery phase was firmly in the national spotlight. This was arguably the biggest civil emergency in British history.

1.2 The Pitt Review

- 1.2.1 The ministerial response to the summer 2007 floods was to ask Sir Michael Pitt to lead an independent 'lessons learned' review focussing on flood risk management, vulnerability of critical infrastructure, emergency response, emergency planning and flood recovery. The review's interim report was published in December 2007 for a 3 month consultation period with the final report appearing in June 2008. The full report is available for download from

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/thepittreview/final_report.aspx. A printed copy will be available to members at the meeting.

- 1.2.2 The outcomes of the Pitt Review are a set of 92 recommendations with each recommendation having a delivery timetable and a lead organisation responsible for its implementation. The recommendations are directed at government departments, local authorities, the Environment Agency, internal drainage boards, the Cabinet Office, local resilience forums, and others.
- 1.2.3 18 of these recommendations are allocated non-specifically to local authorities and a further 6 are allocated to local resilience forums. In this context 'local authority' may apply equally to Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council or Kent County Council although other recommendations are specifically allocated to 'Upper Tier Local Authorities'. Depending on where the responsibilities actually fall, the expectations on local government are significant and are bound to raise concerns about resources unless specific financial provision is made. **Annex 1** lists these 24 recommendations with added comments.
- 1.2.4 Strictly, the Pitt Review Final Report is a communication between Sir Michael, as chair of the review team, and the Secretary of State. The next formal step is for the government to prepare a detailed response and prioritised action plan with a delivery date of autumn 2008. Generally speaking though, the pragmatic approach of the lead organisations has been to assume that the recommendations will translate into obligations and much work has been done particularly in view of some of the tight deadlines.

1.3 Legal Implications

- 1.3.1 A widely held view was that the legislation governing flood risk management was not up to date or fit for purpose. The proposed Floods and Water Bill was announced well in advance of the Pitt final report and the timetable is for the draft bill to be published for consultation in spring 2009.
- 1.3.2 The intention is that the Act will be a single unifying act 'that addresses all sources of flooding, clarifies responsibilities and facilitates flood risk management' to quote from recommendation 28. We understand that it will also be an enabling act such that further necessary regulations can subsequently be enacted.

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.4.1 The review concludes that for all recommendations, the benefits will outweigh the costs and this consideration was part of the decision making process.
- 1.4.2 In reality it is still far too early to predict what the financial implications of the Pitt Review will be and it will be interesting to see how the government intends that any extra burden on local government will be financed.

1.5 Risk Assessment

1.5.1 None considered at this stage.

1.6 Policy considerations

1.6.1 Our Improvement Priorities include '*Reduce the risk of flooding of residential and commercial premises*'

Background papers:

contact: Steve Medlock

Nil

Steve Humphrey
Director of Planning Transport and Leisure

Matthew Balfour
Cabinet Member for Planning and Transportation