

**2020 floods****Responsible officer**

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**1.0 Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the flooding that took place throughout Shropshire in February 2020, and the partnership response to those floods. The report also examines the lessons learned from the response and suggests recommendations to strengthen Shropshire's readiness for any future flooding.
- 1.2 Shropshire Council were commended by many of those affected, and by key partners, for the way in which it responded to the flooding. That said, there were opportunities for learning that are covered in this report.

**2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The report suggests the following recommendations:
- Shropshire Council develop a Severe Weather Plan to consolidate its preparation across all departments for future extreme weather events.
  - The Severe Weather Plan should also include a plan to create a reserve officer capacity, to be deployed when an extreme weather event occurs.
  - Shropshire Council support the establishment of a wider grants team to deliver future grant funding to allow officers to focus on their substantive posts.
  - Shropshire Council should fund the National Flood Forum to assist in community engagement and the creation of flood action groups across Shropshire to provide support for residents and businesses post flood events.

**3.0 Opportunities and risks**

- 3.1 A review of the response to the February 2020 flooding provides Shropshire Council and its partners the opportunity to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of its response. Understanding these allows all partners to provide greater

resilience to future flooding and to understand the context in which Shropshire Council is developing longer-term flood management schemes.

- 3.2 A failure to scrutinise the response to the February 2020 flooding would risk losing the opportunity to learn any lessons from the response. This risks Shropshire Council and its partners preparing insufficiently for a similar or more severe flooding event in the future.
- 3.3 A failure to provide adequate long-term management of flooding could place Shropshire and neighbouring local authorities at greater risk of severe flooding incidents in built up areas alongside or close to rivers, causing significant damage to property and danger to human life.

#### **4.0 Financial assessment**

- 4.1 The additional cost to Shropshire Council of responding to storm Ciara, storm Dennis and the following heavy rains approached £520,000. It also incurred unavoidable capital costs of at least £2.74m. Under the Government's Bellwin Scheme, Shropshire Council was only able to claim grant aid for about £60,000 of these costs.

#### **5.0 February 2020 flooding**

- 5.1 Over the winter of 2019 – 2020, the River Severn catchment saw some of the highest river levels ever recorded. Our region experienced the wettest June to October on record followed by the wettest February since records began. During this time, several major incidents relating to flooding were called in Shropshire and significant flood events were experienced October, November, February and March.

On 8th February 2020, storm Ciara caused high winds and heavy rain across Wales and northern England. During storm Ciara there was widespread surface water flooding to property, with significant impact on transport infrastructure across Shropshire. The rise in river levels resulted in the deployment of the flood defences in Shrewsbury town centre.

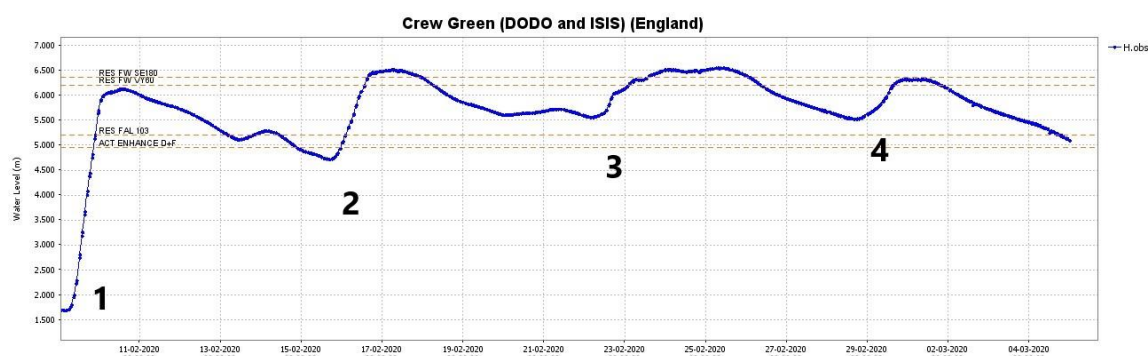
The following weekend of the 15<sup>th</sup> February storm Dennis, an even stronger storm, hit Wales and central England particularly hard. Storm Dennis resulted in new record river levels being set on the river Teme in Ludlow, and on the River Severn at Montford Bridge. River levels in Shrewsbury reached just below the record levels set during the historic floods of 2000.

The Environment Agency described the speed and severity of the flooding during storm Dennis as unprecedented. Due to the catchment being completely saturated, the Environment Agency's flood models struggled to keep pace with events, making response planning extremely difficult. The speed and severity of flooding both from rivers and surface water placed a significant strain on the

resources of both Shropshire Council and the emergency services, with teams fully committed across the county throughout this period.

Further rain produced by storm Jorge on the 29<sup>th</sup> of February maintained high river levels for over three weeks. In Shrewsbury, at Welsh Bridge, river levels remained above 4 metres for seven days. River levels remained above their typical range of 0.42 metres and 2.70 metres between 10 February and 4 March 2020, apart from a break of two days between storm Ciara and storm Dennis.

- 5.2 The flooding impacted communities along the River Severn with the villages of Molverley, Pentre and Kinnerley, located near the Severn Vyrnwy confluence, experiencing continual high river levels from early February to March with significant peaks caused by each storm event. The gauge at Crew Green peaked at 6.55m on 25<sup>th</sup> February, just under the level of 6.57m during the 2000 event. A graph of river levels at Crew Green gauge throughout February is shown below:

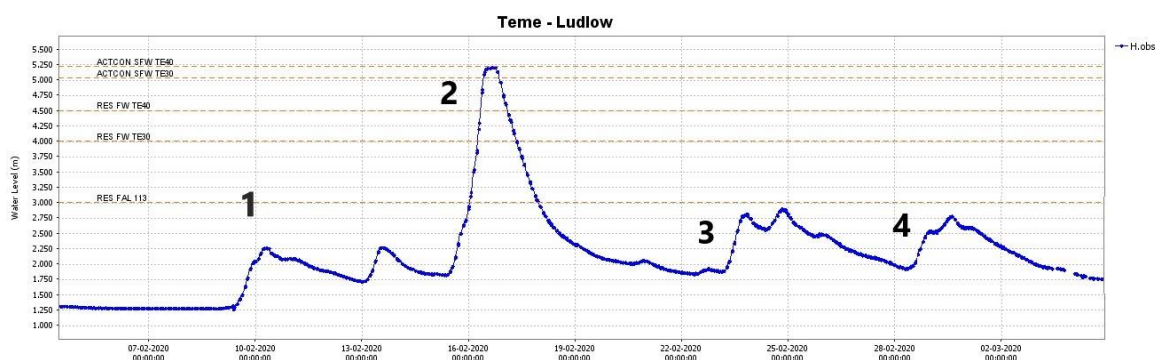


1. Storm Ciara
2. Storm Dennis
3. Heavy rain
4. Storm Jorge

During this time, areas of these villages were completely cut off by floodwater. Although the community is used to flood events and is relatively resilient, flooding of this magnitude and duration has not been experienced for some time. During the event welfare visits were undertaken by Shropshire Fire and Rescue by boat and amphibious vehicles, and one resident was removed to safety and provided temporary accommodation at a care home.

- 5.3 In Shrewsbury the Environment Agency deployed every phase of the town's flood defences, protecting areas around Frankwell and Abbey Foregate. However other areas of the town which are not protected by formal defences, such as Coleham, Smithfield Road, Chester St and Coton Hill, flooded for the first time since the 2000 event. Flooding occurred to both businesses and residential properties in the town centre and had a significant impact on transport infrastructure due to the closure of many roads and rail lines into Shrewsbury. The flooding also had a significant financial impact on town centre shops and businesses.

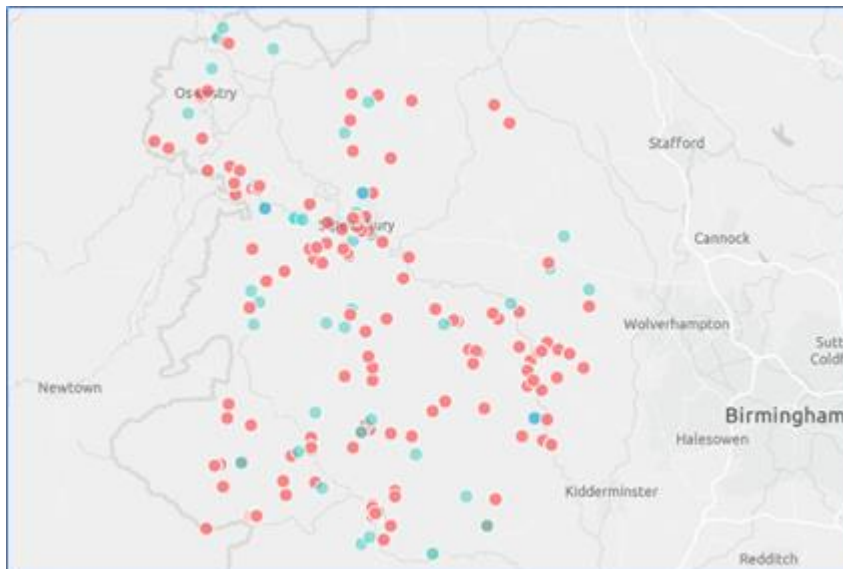
- 5.4 In Bridgnorth high levels on the River Sever resulted in property flooding within the town. Bridgnorth experienced the highest fluvial levels since the flood of 2000 with levels peaking at 5.19m on the Bridgnorth gauge on 26<sup>th</sup> February, compared to typical level of between 0.52 metres and 3.60 metres. Twenty-three properties were reported to have been impacted by flooding and both Riverside and Doctors Lane had to be closed throughout the event.
- 5.5 In Ludlow storm Dennis caused a huge spike in the depth of both the River Corve and River Teme as they passed through the town. At its peak on 16<sup>th</sup> February The River Teme reached a depth of 5.2m on the Ludlow Gauge, compared to its usual depth of 0.86m. The River Corve reached a peak depth of 3.76m on the same day, compared to its usual depth of 0.7m. A graph of river Teme levels in Ludlow throughout February is shown below:



1. Storm Ciara
2. Storm Dennis
3. Heavy rain
4. Storm Jorge

The surge from Storm Dennis caused rapid and extensive flooding throughout Ludlow town centre, including around 50 properties on Lower Corve Street, Temeside and Weeping Cross Lane.

- 5.6 Although large numbers of properties were flooded in Shrewsbury, Bridgnorth and Ludlow, the storms in February affected properties and transport infrastructure across the entire county. The location of known flooded properties was captured during the event and is shown on the graph below.



Internal flooding to property occurred mainly across the south of the county from both surface water and smaller rivers such as the River Clun and River Redlake and on the tributaries of the Rea Brook catchment. Many of these locations had not previously flooded previously and the speed of the flooding made it difficult for both property owners and agencies to respond effectively.

- 5.7 The storms also had a significant impact on highway infrastructure across the entire county. It has to be recognised that prior to the storms the condition of the highway network had deteriorated as a direct result of the “Beast from the East” event in 2018 and reduced investment in maintenance of the carriageway and drainage assets, over an extended period. This is not exclusive to Shropshire and is a situation that has been replicated across highway authorities across the country.

Due to reduced levels of maintenance of the highway gullies and connecting drainage systems the network was not as resilient as it could have been if higher levels of maintenance been undertaken. Subsequent surveys of some drainage systems in high-risk areas have shown blockages and silting that will have reduced the capacity of the system and it is anticipated that this situation is reflected elsewhere in the drainage systems.

In rural locations, the significant reduction in ditch maintenance and grip cutting had a more prominent detrimental effect in rural areas where road construction is less designed to modern standards. This caused significant impact and costs in these locations, as natural drainage assets were not effective or inaccessible.

The reduced capacity of the drainage system meant that surface and flood waters were unable to run off the carriageway in many parts of the county, effectively resulting in significant carriageway and edge break deterioration and in some areas undermining of the structural integrity of the carriageway. This has placed additional pressure on budgets, as more routine maintenance had to be carried

out in flood-hit locations to remove high volumes of silt and mud deposits and an increase in the number of carriageway defects in need of repair.

The vast majority of the costs incurred fell outside of the Bellwin fund and therefore had to be accommodated from within the existing budget provision.

## **6 Emergency response**

- 6.1 On Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> February, after a discussion held with Shropshire Council's Emergency Planning Officer and West Mercia Police Inspector on call, the Multi-Agency Tactical Co-ordinating Group ("TCG") for Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin was called. At the first meeting a major incident was declared and TCG continued to operate continuously round the clock at Shropshire Fire and Rescue headquarters for 2 weeks. Regular scheduled meetings averaged 3 a day during that period. All emergency services had continual representation for the duration of the incident.

Rest centres were opened in Shrewsbury in Coleham, Bridgnorth and Ludlow. The Ludlow centre was opened and managed by the town council. A new community emergency plan which the town council and community members created with the assistance of the Emergency Planning Unit was tested for the first time. For the first time, we enlisted the assistance of the British Red Cross to assist in running the Bridgnorth rest centre. As a result, we have discussed further partnering with the British Red Cross to provide additional resources in the centres, alongside our internal rest centre volunteers.

The council's incident room was opened on the Monday morning and was used as a coordinating centre for the response. The Emergency Planning Team consists of two emergency planning officers. The scale of the response and the need for a presence at TCG, our Incident Room and Rest Centres required the assistance of additional resources, our out of hours duty officers, provided much needed support to the team. These duty officers come from other areas of the council. Other officers also provided additional cover and support during the incident.

Through TCG several coordinated rescues, evacuations and welfare checks were conducted. Most notably a multi-agency (fire, council, ambulance and police) group were tasked to check on the residents of Molverley and other outlying villages.

- 6.2 In response to storms Ciara and Dennis Shropshire Council officers across all departments worked extremely long hours to provide an effective response to the flooding. It should be noted that some officers went above and beyond during this period taking on responsibilities outside of their normal remit over a difficult two-week period.

- 6.3 During and directly after the flooding community engagement teams made up of staff from both the land drainage team (staffed by WSP) and adult services teams were out in the worst affected areas contacting flooded residents to ensure they had access to support on offer by Shropshire Council. This approach ensured good communication with local communities and helped gather information on the situation on the ground to be relayed back to the TCG.

Unfortunately, after the flooding had receded, due to restrictions associated with Covid-19 there were difficulties in effectively supporting flooded residents in their recovery. Due to restrictions on site visits, it was also not possible to immediately investigate the cause of flooding from across the county.

In order to address this Shropshire Council worked with Worcestershire Council on a pilot project led by the National Flood Forum (NFF) to provide virtual recovery support over an online platform of video calls with flooded residents and the relevant risk management authorities. This innovative approach was seen as national best practice during the pandemic and as a result this was fully funded by the Environment Agency.

Large amounts of follow up engagement work has now been done by the Land Drainage Team and the NFF resulting in the establishment of several new Flood Actions Groups across the County. It should be noted however that apart from the virtual recovery work the NFF are not currently funded by Shropshire Council.

Shropshire Council are working on a joint proposal with Telford & Wrekin Council to employ the National Flood Forum to support the local flood groups in providing more effective strategic and operational support to be better placed to mitigate the likelihood of future flooding events and better inform council strategies.

## **7. Transport**

- 7.1 The flooding in February also had a significant impact on Transport and the ability for people to move around the county effectively. Flooded areas and the resultant road closures meant significant diversions at times which resulted in significant delays for some services. In summary the key impacts for public transport were as follows:

### **7.2 School Transport**

A number of routes within the County were impacted by the floods. Through close liaison with the schools, operators and parent's, temporary arrangements were put in place to reduce the impact on pupil's attendance, albeit there was disruption and delays in getting pupils to school at normal times.

### **7.3 Shropshire Council Fleet**

A number of the Councils fleet services were severely disrupted by the floods, in the majority of these cases the greatest impact was felt through the diversionary routes and the large amount of congestion, creating severe delays.

A number of the children's specialist routes to Severndale school required drivers and passenger assistants to depart much earlier and return much later than normal. Disruption to these specialist services can be extremely disconcerting to our customers and as such there is a need to keep service as consistent as possible. Staff were able to identify safe alternative routes, which meant that these pupils were only on transport for the minimum amount of time possible.

#### **7.4 Public Transport**

A number of bus service in multiple areas across the County, were impacted by the floods, in particular Ludlow, Bridgnorth & Shrewsbury. Officers ensured that support was provided, identifying alternative routing and pick up and drop off points for passengers relayed through the media and the Councils own website.

It was essential that this information was always "live" to ensure passenger knew where to board and alight, bearing in mind that many of these passengers could be vulnerable.

With access to Shrewsbury bus station either limited or unavailable, three temporary disembarkation points located on the perimeter of the town centre were immediately set up at the following locations:

- Abbey Foregate Car Park (for buses approaching from the south and east)
- New Park Road (for buses approaching from the north)
- Theatre Severn (for buses approaching from the west)

#### **7.5 Shrewsbury Park & Ride**

With the floods impacting the ability of the service to board and alight passengers at the vast majority of the recognised stops, the alternative routing for floods was put into place. This plan has been refined over a number of years from previous experience of floods in Shrewsbury and maintained access to the town for passengers.

### **8 Business support**

- 8.1 The Business Support and Investment Team within Economic Growth supported businesses throughout Shropshire affected by the floods by providing a designated, named officer who provided direct support immediately after the floods and for a number of months afterwards.
- 8.2 This involved direct 1-2-1 contact with businesses through visits and group / partner meetings, and more involved scheduled meetings with larger businesses and those most adversely affected and experiencing significant damage.



For example, meetings took place in Shrewsbury with The Lion & Pheasant, The Boathouse, The Libertine Group, Pughs Funeral Directors, Salopian Bar and the Barnabas Centre, which administers the Shrewsbury Food Bank.

Emphasis was placed on direct action, not just reassurance, and what was needed to support their immediate recovery through liaison with Highways and Transport flood and street cleaning and was brokered as appropriate). This was alongside access to the grant scheme that was available (see below).

The Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire, Anna Turner JP was hosted twice on reassurance visits around Coleham and in Ludlow. 'On the ground' support provided to businesses ensured she was adequately briefed and introduced to those businesses most affected to hear their concerns.

- 8.3 The Economic Growth team were also represented at a number of meetings to publicise the support that was available answers queries from businesses. They included the Assistant Director of Economic Growth participating in a Shrewsbury BID-hosted webinar, a drop-in session at Stop! Café in the museum and a further business meeting in The Armoury for the town's businesses with numerous partners present.

A business meeting led by Coleham businesses and coordinated by Cllr Kate Halliday was attended by Shropshire Council officers from Economic Growth and Highways, alongside Environment Agency personnel. This has resulted in a Coleham Business Flood Response Group being set up to proactively coordinate their activity and respond to controls and procedures they can put in place as a collective.

Joint working between economic growth and highways, particularly flooding resulted in a coordinated approach from Shropshire Council and moral support for officers when dealing with businesses not happy or frustrated with the response from the local authority.

- 8.4 Shrewsbury BID and Shrewsbury Town Council were key to the response effort, given that Shrewsbury was badly affected, and the town centre completely closed for a number of days, with media reports circulating of 'threat of loss to life'.

Given the close working relationship within the economic growth team that was already established, close liaison with the council's B&I team ensured that resources could be pooled to meet the immediate need to reach businesses to advise them of the support available to them. This included financial grants and the Highways and street cleaning resources, which included skips and officers to facilitate the clear up operation.

- 8.5 The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs provided a flood support grant scheme for businesses, which Shropshire Council administered. Businesses

applied to the Business and Investment Team, who assessed and authorised payments by both the Assistant Director of Economic Growth and Head of Finance.

A maximum grant amount of £2,500 was available to eligible businesses to contribute towards direct and indirect costs (predominately loss of sales) incurred over the period.

The scheme was open to applications from 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 and it officially closed in early July. There have been a couple of exceptions where an application has been accepted later than the agreed closure date.

There were 556 unique applications by Shropshire-based businesses, with 79% being based in Shrewsbury (422) but also many from Ludlow, Bridgnorth and the surrounding areas resulting in 108 southern applications and 26 from businesses based north of Shrewsbury.

59% of Shrewsbury's applications were concentrated within the river loop of the town centre. 40 were directly affected by the flooding citing physical damage and the rest (209) had their trade affected by the road closures and limited physical access into the area.

To date 526 applications have been approved, resulting in £1,080,000 being awarded to businesses. This makes the average claim £2,053. However, It is worth noting that 333 or 63% (nearly two-thirds) of the applications were for the maximum amount of £2,500 with many stating losses well in excess of the amount they were able to claim.

There are a very small number of applications awaiting further detail from businesses to complete. There have been fewer than five rejections where the business has not been eligible for the award.

Have been open for over six months, this scheme is now closed but there is still grant funding available for those businesses affected by the floods.

The next stage of Shropshire's flood response involves another grant being made available to businesses to implement flood-resistant and flood-resilient measures to their properties (both residential and business) and this is managed through the Flood Team within Highways and Transport.

Additional financial support was provided in May 2020, with over £2m of Growth Funding awarded by the Marches LEP to Shropshire Council and the other Local Authorities within the area to respond to both Covid-19 and the preceding flooding events. £137,000 was allocated to towns across Shropshire with a focus on 'place marketing' activity and to drive footfall to those areas. The towns that were most affected by flooding were awarded larger amounts to reflect the effect the floods had on trade ahead of the global pandemic.

## **9 Communications and Customer Services**

- 9.1 Storm Ciara and Storm Dennis, and the resulting flooding required timely, regular and effective communications to ensure that Shropshire residents and businesses were kept informed, and up-to-date, about the impact of the storms/flooding, and about the help and support available to them.
- 9.2 To ensure that this happened, the communications team spent more than two weeks dealing solely with flood-related communications, with officers often working from early in the morning until late in the evening, and at weekends.

Communication was largely, though not exclusively, through regular website updates, provision of information to the media via press releases, Newsroom updates, and direct contact with key media outlets, radio and television interviews, social media updates, and the taking and sharing of videos and photographs.

The team also helped produce bespoke leaflets providing advice to residents and businesses about the support available.

Good internal communication was also vital. A series of WhatsApp group were set up to enable officers at the frontline to quickly and easily share information and, importantly, photographs with communications officers. The information and photographs could then be shared via social media.

Updates were also provided to the chief executive and directors, with senior officers, and with all council staff.

Members of the team also attended and contributed to regular meetings with senior managers and emergency planning officers.

Key messages focussed on: current and predicted flood levels; road and car park closures; changes to bus services; how to access sandbags and other support; financial support and how to claim; support for communities and businesses, including rest centres; health and safety risks relating to flood water.

Good communications was crucial during the flooding of 2020. The after effects of Ciara and Dennis undoubtedly put great pressure on the communications team who, at short notice, were required to 'drop everything' and work almost entirely - and for long hours - on storm and flood related activity. Being a relatively small team at the time added to the pressure placed on the team.

However, the team proved that they could quickly and effectively provide the communications help and support that was required and were able to gain crucial first-hand experience of dealing with such a major incident and learned many valuable lessons in the process - meaning we are now better placed to deal with a similar situation should it arise in the future.

- 9.3 The customer service centre provided the main contact point through which Shropshire's residents could report incidents, emergencies and request services as well as handle the many offers of help and donations from communities and businesses.

Under normal circumstances, flooding incidents are reported using an option on the Highways reporting line and this is the number advertised on the flooding pages on Shropshire Council's website. To aid residents calling in, changes were made to the recorded greeting messages to make it simpler for the caller to identify the number and option to select and so that flooding calls in particular could be identified and prioritised by advisers.

Customer Services worked with the flooding team to develop the questions and processes to record flooding incidents and property damage, allowing this to be mapped and then checked against grant applications.

Having a single point of contact aided both the accuracy of the information given to residents and of information gathered as well as ensuring that the call handler was able to better assist through having the widest view of the support available and how to access it. This proved to be valuable learning for the Covid-19 support that is currently offered.

During the height of the emergency the contact centre stayed open into the evenings, extending their opening hours to 9pm when required and also providing some cover over weekends with management remaining on call at all times. Sustaining this from a relatively small pool of telephony staff proved problematic given their already long business as usual opening commitments. Funding was therefore made available to Shropdoc, as our current out of hours provider, to extend operations beyond those times, again supported by customer services management.

## **10 Adult Social Care and communities**

- 10.1 Adult Social Care played an important role in co-ordinating that community reassurance work around the county, involving staff from the Community Partnerships Team and the community social work teams working alongside Housing, Public Health, Regulatory services and Emergency Planning.
- 10.2 Adult Social Care played a more operational role to support the people known to our services directly involved by flood water. Teams had days of intense work; social workers out in their areas checking on people in their homes, tracking people down in temporary accommodation and caravan parks, taking supplies to people by boat, checking to establish where vulnerable people were, what support they were getting, what support they needed and whether people needed to be evacuated.

- 10.3 Our Business Support Team was able to overlay the location of the people known to our services with information about the areas affected by flooding. This had to be done rapidly using information from a number of sources. We are ensuring that this information is available to us and staff know how to access it as part of our planning for future flooding events.
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- 10.5 As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic the council now has a Community Reassurance Team made up of officers – a small number of core members and others available to join when needed - from across the council who bridge council services and the community. Ensuring this team, its resources and activities continue at appropriate levels will keep the council in a strong position to communicate with, and mobilise communities at times of crisis. This has been a very positive development and addresses previous concerns about the availability of staff to deliver reassurance work and the robustness of processes.
- 10.6 Whilst connections and knowledge pan-council has improved as a result of people working closely together, and the relationship between social care and health continue to strengthen, there still remains the opportunity for social care to develop systems with our blue-light services that will enable a more effective joined up approach to rapidly support vulnerable people in times of crisis.

## **11. Long term proposals**

- 11.1 The River Partnership, formed in September 2019, involves all the local authorities along the River Severn and its catchment. It also includes the key water and environmental agencies in England and Wales and each relevant Local Enterprise Partnership. The partnership is co-chaired by Mark Barrow, Executive Director of Place, Shropshire Council and Claire Dinnis, Midlands Area Director Environment Agency. During autumn last year the partnership agreed terms of reference, appointed a jointly funded project manager and created an enabling fund of around £300,000 to progress studies and business case development.
- 11.2 Although the partnership will work together on strategic river management matters across Shropshire, its initial primary focus will be reviewing the opportunity for greater levels of storage and retention within Wales, combined with an opportunity to construct some form of flood water management scheme alongside the Shrewsbury North West Relief Road.

Whilst at a very early stage of development, the project is aiming to reduce flood risk to nearly 3000 homes along the River Severn. This initiative aims to mitigate and manage flood events up to and including those with a 1% chance of occurring

in any given year (a 1 in 100-year return period flood event). In addition, the design will include an allowance for the impact of future climate change. To set that in context, the flooding seen throughout Shrewsbury during the flood events in 2007 and 2020 would not have been experienced were this scheme to have been in place. Further details are provided in **Appendix 1**.

- 11.3 In addition, the Environment Agency have commissioned ARUP to undertake an assessment into the impacts of flooding in Shrewsbury, Bridgnorth and Ludlow. Anonymised business data from Economic Growth alongside drone imagery has been provided in support of the work. These “Accelerated Project Reports” will assess the potential for flood alleviation schemes where properties are currently undefended. Shropshire Council are working in partnership with the Environment Agency and Severn Trent Water to provide information to support these investigations. The reports will be used to identify the feasibility of new projects to defend properties in each of these locations.

## 12. Lessons learned

Throughout this work, officers have been identifying potential lessons to improve resilience during any future flooding incidents. These are the issues identified so far:

- **Updated Flood Barriers Action Plan.** The action plan associated with the Shrewsbury Flood Barriers was last updated in 2016. The current action plan focuses mainly on Highways Management and whilst it adequately covers the signage requirements for the road closures in Shrewsbury Town Centre, information on roles during deployment and inter-agency cooperation urgently needs improving and updating. During the flood event the effective delivery of the action plan was heavily reliant on the knowledge and experience of key officer's familiar with previous deployments within Shropshire Council. The action plan should be updated in parallel to the Severe Weather Plan so that actions are allocated to officer roles rather than named individuals. The plan should be exercised annually to ensure a range of officers are familiar with its delivery.
- **Cover for the central team.** There were no formal arrangements in place within Shropshire Council for respite for key officers. As a result, the prolonged pressures of the flooding had the potential for knock-on impacts for officer's health and wellbeing. It is essential that this is addressed in the update to the Severe Weather Plan.
- **Earlier road closures.** The road closures included in the Shrewsbury Flood Barriers Action plan have been refined over time to give the Council time to close each highway before it floods. Unfortunately, due to the unprecedented speed of the February event, flooding was experienced shortly after the closures had been put in place. The fast-moving situation meant drivers struggled to keep up to date with events resulting in extensive congestion around the town. As resources were stretched it was

also not possible in all locations to prevent vehicles driving through these closures and creating “bow waves” resulting in increased flooding to property. As part of the update to the Action Plan consideration should be given to amending the trigger levels for road closures in certain locations such as Coleham high street. It should be noted however that businesses in these locations rely heavily on passing trade, therefore reducing this threshold may have an impact on business. It may also result in increase “false alarms” where roads are closed and then not flooded.

- **Supervised road closures.** Although there is some supervision of road closures in key locations included in the action plan, there is currently not provision for 24 hour supervision of road closures or where there are interactions between floodwater and the public. In Coleham this resulted in altercations between the local community and car drivers who ignored the road closures, and an incident where a member of the public entered floodwater resulting in a response from the emergency services. Although some closures were supervised round the clock, there were other areas of the town where no supervision was in place. In order to ensure public safety an assessment of risk throughout the town centre is required. This should be undertaken with other agencies to identify appropriate supervision in key areas throughout a deployment.
- **Lack of community resilience.** There is a need for more awareness of flood risk and preparedness and the role that they need to play alongside Shropshire Council and other public authorities.
- **Reception centres rather than rest centres.** Rest centres were opened in Shrewsbury, Bridgnorth and Ludlow. None of the facilities had visitors. The restaurant at Shirehall was set up as an information and reception centre. This set up worked well as it was based on a “mini” Humanitarian Reception Centre, where all areas of the council who could assist affected residents were present in the facility and there were co-ordinated communications with the emergency services if needed. It was a one-stop shop for assistance.
- **Lack of a central incident desk.** There is a need for a single flood emergency line that can be surfaced when needed and widely communicated to residents making the priority of incoming calls more recognisable. This has subsequently been tested successfully for the Coronavirus pandemic where a range of support is available through one knowledgeable contact point and a similar provision to aid in the event of future flooding is in hand.

This was exacerbated by calls made directly to other services who were out of the loop. This resulted in residents not being asked for all relevant information nor given all relevant advice in return.

Out of hours, both residents and councillors had trouble reporting issues through the Shropdoc out of hours service. This service effectively just forwarded messages to call back callers to the duty highway officer, as the service is not set up to add information to Confirm in the same way that the normal call centre operation does. Duty highway officers were therefore extremely stretched between balancing out the carrying out of remedial measures and making phone calls to those reporting issues. This led to delays in people receiving responses to their concerns at a time where there was obvious concern for the safety of property, leading to considerable frustration from customers and councillors. A centralised incident desk to receive calls, log areas at risk and direct resources would have allowed operational staff to focus on preventative and reactive strategies to mitigate some of the impacts of flooding and provide a more informed response to enable self-support.

A dedicated out of hours line for councillors and parishes would have enabled multiple reports in areas to be coordinated and reported in an effective way and helped prioritise needs given the local knowledge that they hold. Improved engagement could also have enabled mobilisation of local support to support council staff on lower priority activities or communicating to local residents to reduce the demand of council contact.

- **Poor awareness of the internal emergency response “command and control structure”.** It became apparent that some areas were not fully aware of the operational emergency plans that are in place for a major incident response. Further awareness training is required and should be refreshed on a pre-determined time basis to ensure that all staff are aware of the procedures. This requires senior management support as previous training sessions that were held in the past were poorly attended.
- **Contact provision.** The issue of being unable to sustain extended hours and out of hours contact provision was tested and has again been sorely tested during Coronavirus. A working group is now looking at the available resources and requirements in order to future-proof this.
- **Limited capacity to process grant funding applications.** The scale and severity of the flooding to property across the Severn catchment resulted in Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) announcing the availability of grant funding for flooded residents. The scheme allowed them to claim up to £5,000 towards making their properties more resilient to future flooding through the installation of Property Flood Resilience measures (PFR). As approximately 600 properties were impacted by flooding across Shropshire, the total funding potentially available to properties in Shropshire is around £3 million. Shropshire Council is



responsible for managing the PFR grant in line with Defra guidance, however no funding for officer time has been provided by Defra to assist Shropshire Council in delivery.

Due to the nature of the measures funded by this grant, and the limited resources within the Council as a result of the distribution of the subsequent Covid grants, the establishment and delivery of the PFR grant fell solely to Shropshire Councils Flood Risk Manager. As a result, this grant had a significant impact on capacity. Identification of an additional resource to support the administering of this grant could have enabled more capacity for the Flood Risk Manager to spend on recovery from the February flooding and preparation for potential future flooding. As a result this has impacted on the ability of the Flood Risk Manager to fulfil his substantive role.

In addition, customer services advisers lost sight of the grants process and needed access to be able to advise residents and businesses calling to chase up applications they had made. Some were desperate for news. Methodologies developed as a result of Covid-19 will help avoid this in any future event.

- **Grant provision.** Loss of trade was a key problem for businesses so the emphasis on support going forward needs to consider this element in grant provision, not just on the physical damage flooding has on business premises.
- **Positive publicity.** National news coverage highlighting the plight of Shrewsbury and the messages of 'threat to life' were seen by businesses to be detrimental to the recovery of the town. A positive publicity campaign could counteract this.
- **A nominated officer each for businesses and residents to correspond with directly.** This provided reassurance and trust to businesses that they were being heard, their queries responded to in a timely manner and updates on their grant applications provided. The same is needed for housing support as there was no designated officer to provide a response to residents. In addition, business support is needed for a longer duration as business begin to recover and apply for available financial support – this has a resource impact.

**List of background papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)**

None

**Cabinet Member (Portfolio holder)**

Cllr Gwilym Butler, Communities, Place Planning and Regulatory Services  
Cllr Dean Carroll, Adult Social Services and Climate Change  
Cllr Steve Davenport, Highways and Transport  
Cllr Steve Charmley, Portfolio Holder for Assets, Economic Growth and Regeneration

**Local member**

All

**Appendices**

Appendix 1: Report from Director of Place to Cabinet *River Severn Partnership - Shropshire Flood Prevention*, 27 September 2020