

**DRAINAGE
(Report by the Working Group)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At their meeting held on 19th June 2012, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) decided to establish a working group to engage with Anglian Water to establish their general powers, responsibilities and limitations on its ability to prevent flooding. The working group comprised Councillors Mrs M Banerjee and J W Davies.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Panel's interest in this matter has been prompted by a particular drainage problem within the District and a lack of progress towards achieving a resolution to it. A petition had been presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) on 5th December 2011 by Parish Councillor Mrs A Rees in respect of sewage overflow at Windsor Road and Main Street, Yaxley. The petition had been referred to the Panel from the Council meeting on 2nd November 2011. Members had been advised that the Executive Leader of the Council had written to Anglian Water expressing his concerns over this matter and a response had been received. Although Anglian Water's response addressed the particular instance of flooding referred to in the petition, Members were not satisfied with it and with Anglian Water's programme generally to prevent problems with the drainage system in the District from occurring and their response to sewerage system failures.
- 2.2 At this same meeting, Members had been advised that residents in Hemingford Abbots had experienced similar problems. Other instances when the drainage system had proved inadequate have also been reported. It has been suggested that the Environment Agency had enforcement powers that it might use in such situations.
- 2.3 Mrs S Pledger, Cambridgeshire County Council's Flood and Water Manager, has attended the Panel meeting on 9th February 2012 to discuss flood risk management in Cambridgeshire. At this meeting, Members have been advised that the Cambridgeshire Flood Risk Management Partnership is made up of local District Councils, Cambridgeshire County Council, Anglian Water, Environment Agency, Middle Level Commissioners and three of the sixty-three Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs). As part of the new arrangements, the County Council has to maintain a register of assets for flood risk management, adopt, approve and maintain sustainable drainage systems in new developments, regulate flows of ordinary watercourses outside IDBs and plan for, and manage, any flood emergencies. The County Council has also been tasked with investigating instances of flooding in order to establish responsibility and identify solutions to problems.
- 2.4 Members have noted that the new arrangements strongly emphasise joint working and that partner organisations have concurrent powers. Members have queried whether this disperses responsibility for preventing and

responding to flooding. In response, it has been stated that, under the legal framework that has been established, a single authority usually has statutory responsibilities for particular aspects of flood management with others having permissive powers. The District Council largely has permissive powers.

- 2.5 On 19th June 2012, the Panel considered the St Neots Surface Water Management Plan. In so doing, Members have questioned why steps are only being taken to alleviate flood risk in St Neots when other areas of the District have also suffered from significant flooding. In response, it has been explained that the Surface Water Management Plan contains a prioritised list of areas that have been identified as being susceptible to surface water flooding through a multi-factor analysis. St Neots has the highest priority on the list and, therefore, most in need of flood risk alleviation measures.

3. DISCUSSIONS

- 3.1 The Working Group has been addressed by Anglian Water's Mr Steve Langlois, Planning and Equivalence Manager, Asset Planning, Mr Pete Duell, Economic Regulation Analyst, and Mr Richard Farrow, Wastewater Infrastructure Manager, Asset Planning. Members have been advised how under capacity issues within the sewerage system are dealt with and funded. It has been explained that if flooding occurs under normal weather conditions, checks are undertaken to verify whether it has been caused by pipes being too small or the water flow being too great. If a property floods, either internally or externally, then it is added to the DG5 'at risk' register. Within Huntingdonshire, the register currently has five properties at risk of internal flooding and thirty-six properties at risk of external flooding. Every five years Anglian Water has to submit a business plan to OFWAT, which sets out how much customers' bills will need to increase by in order to fund improvements to the system. It has been emphasised that a thorough cost benefit analysis of each improvement scheme is undertaken to ensure the maximum benefit to customers. OFWAT is charged with approving the plan case, it has been noted that the total amount of requested funding has never been granted in the past. Once funding has been received, Anglian Water carries out the works. These are prioritised according to their cost-benefit score up to the value allowed by OFWAT. Where no solution to a problem is possible given the cost-benefit analysis and allowance from OFWAT, mitigation works are undertaken. Where a permanent solution is found, usually in the form of bigger pipes, properties are removed from the DG5 'at risk' register.

- 3.2 Anglian Water has acknowledged that problems exist with the current approach; these being:-

- Most high risk internal cost beneficial schemes have been funded, therefore they are left with problems which affect few properties and/or have high cost solutions;
- Internal flooding is a higher priority than external flooding, regardless of the consequence;
- The allowance set by OFWAT is tied to reductions on specific registers;
- Solutions are not permitted to give less than 1 in 30 year protections, even if they will benefit customers; and
- Expensive solutions, such as bigger pipes, tended to be favoured.

- 3.3 The Working Group has been pleased to note that from 2015, OFWAT will focus on alternative solutions such as mitigation, less than 1 in 30 year solutions, SuDs and a risk based approach to flooding (frequency as well as impact).
- 3.4 Having questioned the impact of new developments on the capacity of drains and sewers, it has been reported that Anglian Water are not statutory consultees on applications, however, generally they are consulted. Anglian Water are not able to refuse connections and have a statutory requirement to accept new developments. Where pipes need to be made bigger to serve a development, Anglian Water works with the planning authority to implement conditions. Anglian Water looks to developers to contribute to the upgrading of pipes. Plans for an area are assessed at a strategic level to determine the infrastructure required to serve a new development.
- 3.5 Having questioned how representative the 'at risk' register of properties is, Mr Farrow has explained to Members that, in order to be added to the register, a property has to meet specific under capacity criteria, that is, the pipes have to be too small or the flow too great. It has been emphasised that all reports of flooding are investigated. However, some homeowners are reluctant to have flooding issues thoroughly investigated as they do not want to have their homes placed on the 'at risk' register because it could affect their insurance. This reluctance to co-operate had a negative impact as Anglian Water need a thorough understanding of the extent of flooding incidents in order to justify funding of improvement works.
- 3.6 Ms Lucy Freeman, Partnerships and Strategic Overview Officer, Environment Agency, has explained that the Environment Agency has a responsibility to investigate flood sources, however their main concern is flooding from rivers and reservoirs.
- 3.7 Mr Tim Blackmore, Tactical Support Manager, Wastewater Services, Anglian Water, has outlined how Anglian Water responds to reports of sewer flooding. When reporting issues to the call centre, a reference number should always be taken, this ensures that the progress of the issue can be traced. It has been noted that Anglian Water is focusing on improving customer service and customer satisfaction. The Customer Liaison Manager is the link between the customer and Anglian Water. However, he cannot be contacted directly and all calls have to go through Anglian Water's call centre.
- 3.8 As all calls are recorded it is possible for problems such as recurring blocked sewers to be identified. Anglian Water has sought to improve customer behaviour that causes drainage problems by mounting campaigns in areas where recurring problems have been identified. Blockages in Peterborough have been reduced by 50% as a result of a campaign. Proactive letter drops have been undertaken which are linked to the 'keep it clear' campaign.
- 3.9 Members have been advised that Anglian Water contacts customers periodically to assess their satisfaction with its service. However, if a customer wishes to complain about Anglian Water they could do so via phone, letter or email to Anglian Water. Alternatively, complaints can be escalated by the customer to the Consumer Council for Water, an independent body that represents water customers.

- 3.10 Having regard to causes of local flooding, Members have been advised that many capacity issues are caused by surface water inputs. Water companies have limited powers to remove surface water. Lead Local Flood Authorities have been established that have a duty to investigate local flooding.
- 3.11 Mr Adam Basham of the Environment Agency has advised that the Agency works closely with Anglian Water. Having specific regard to the sewage overflow into Yaxley Lode on 23rd September 2011, Mr Basham has confirmed that this had been an emergency overflow which had consent. An emergency overflow only applies where there is a mechanical breakdown and where this causes less impact than raw sewage in people's homes. It has been acknowledged that some permits, which give consent to such overflows are quite old and may not have notification conditions within them. It has been reported that notification alarms exist within Anglian Water, whereby Anglian Water are alerted when levels are rising in the sewers and the pumping station. This is designed to minimise the chance of effluent discharge. The permit also allows Anglian Water to discharge effluent as long as conditions are met. If they are not met the Environment Agency can take enforcement action ranging from a caution letter to prosecution.
- 3.12 Mr Basham has acknowledged that the incident at Yaxley Lode on 23rd September 2011, had established that the Environment Agency needed to communicate with residents to notify them of the consents that are in place.
- 3.13 It has been reported that investigations into drainage issues in Yaxley are ongoing. It has been acknowledged that an authority needed to take responsibility for the balancing pond as it is an important feature of the surface water drainage base.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Attention has been drawn to the fact that only one property in Yaxley features on the 'at risk' register. This conflicts with reports of sewage flooding at a number of properties in the village. It has been agreed that this will be scrutinised as part of the ongoing investigations into drainage issues in Yaxley. Mr C Allen, Huntingdonshire District Council's Projects and Asset Manager has undertaken to contact Anglian Water's Operations Officers and Customer Liaison Manager to take this forward. Mr Allen has also agreed to bring these ongoing problems to the attention of relevant County Council Officers.
- 4.2 Having noted that drainage problems still exist in St Ives, Councillor Davies has agreed to co-ordinate information on flooding within the town over the past six months.
- 4.3 Mr Langlois and Mr Blackmore have undertaken to gain further information on the Yaxley issues from Mr Dunlop of Anglian Water and the Customer Liaison Manager and feedback information to Mr Allen.
- 4.4 Members have thanked the representatives from Anglian Water and the Environment Agency for their attendance and co-operation with their investigations.

Chairman