

**Hampshire Flood Risk Management Partnership Event: 9 December 2013**  
**Hampshire County Council Environment & Transportation Select Committee:**  
**Request for Written Evidence**

**Deadline for receipt of responses:** 10 November 2013

The following questions are being addressed to the local flood risk management authorities operating in Hampshire and the relevant regional flood and coastal committees. Your organisation's response to as many of these questions as are relevant will assist the Select Committee in its investigations.

You are welcome to use this document as a basis for your response, or submit a separate document if you prefer.

**Name of Organisation Responding:** Environment Agency

**Contact Name and Contact Details:**

Andrew Gilham - Area Flood and Coastal Risk Manager, Solent & South Downs Area  
Environment Agency, Guildbourne House, Chatsworth Road, Worthing, BN11 1LD  
e-mail: [andrew.gilham@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:andrew.gilham@environment-agency.gov.uk)  
Telephone number 01903 703859

The Environment Agency leads on managing flood risk from "main rivers" (those generally with greatest flood risk to property) and the sea. This involves undertaking many different activities, including raising flood awareness, issuing flood warnings, undertaking planned and reactive maintenance of assets and river systems, promoting and delivering capital projects. We also administer the allocation of national Flood Defence Grant in Aid funding on behalf of Defra for projects that reduce flood and coastal erosion risk.

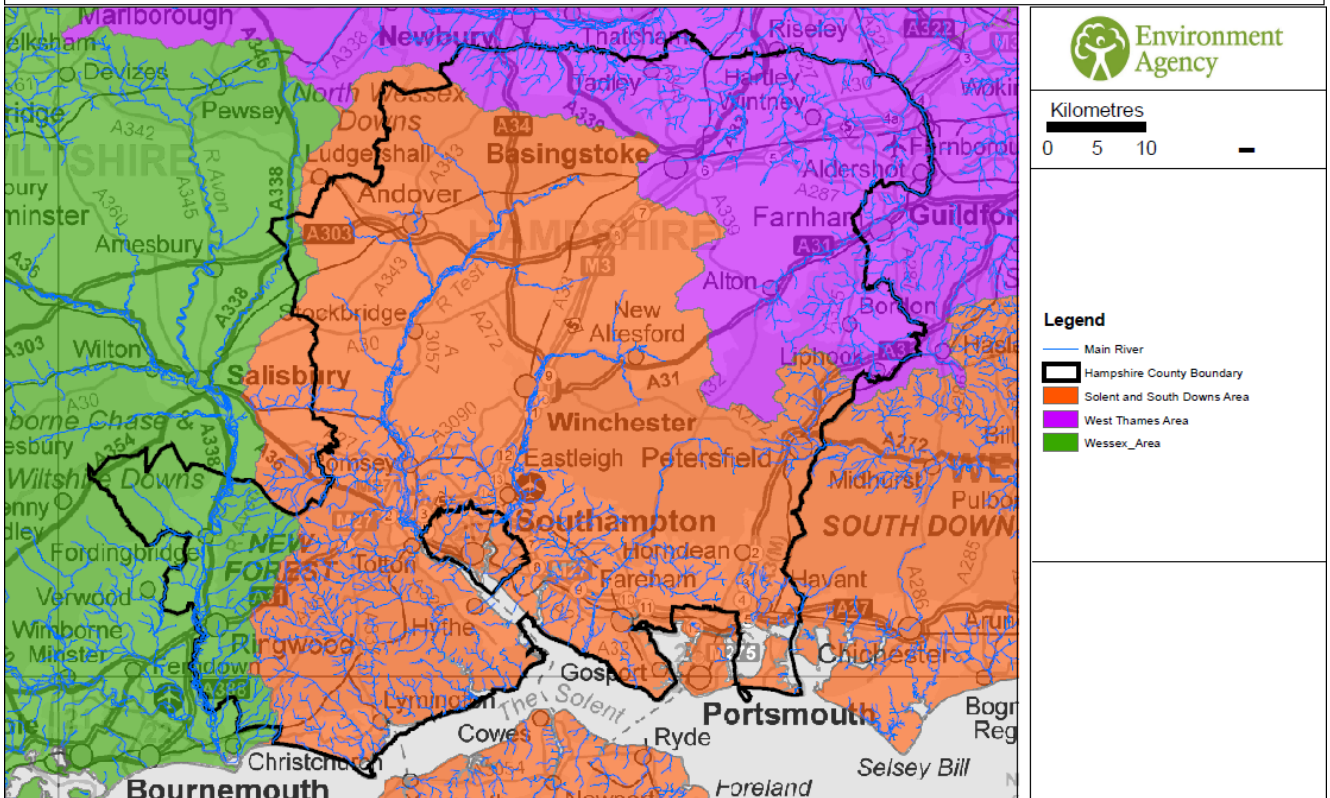
The geography of our operational activities is predominantly based upon river catchment boundaries, rather than local authority administrative boundaries. Operational activities across the county of Hampshire are currently undertaken by Environment Agency teams from our Solent and South Downs, West Thames and Wessex Areas.

The majority of the county of Hampshire falls within the geographical extent of our Solent and South Downs Area. To ensure clear lines of communication between the Environment Agency and Hampshire County Council (as Lead Local Flood Authority), I and my Partnership and Strategic Overview Team (based at our Romsey office) are the lead point of contact for the three Environment Agency areas that cover Hampshire.

The Southern, Thames and Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committees (RFCC) follow similar boundaries. The Chair of each of the three RFCCs will be submitting their own written evidence to the Select Committee.

The map below shows the Environment Agency area boundaries across Hampshire.

Map to show Hampshire County and the Environment Agency Areas



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 Contact Us: National Customer Contact Centre, PO Box 544, Rotherham, S60 1BY. Tel: 08708 506 506 (Mon-Fri 8-6). Email: enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

In addition to covering the majority of Hampshire, my Area also includes the Isle of Wight and most of West Sussex and East Sussex. I therefore work closely with a number of different local authorities, all of which are at different stages of maturity in relation to their roles as Lead Local Flood Authorities.

**Funding**

1. What is the Environment Agency’s understanding of the key challenges in obtaining funding for flood risk management in Hampshire, and how might these be surmounted?

It is not practical to eliminate all flood risk. However the risks can be significantly reduced with an appropriate amount of financial investment and by engaging early with the communities affected.

Securing enough funding for flood and coastal risk management work has historically been a challenge, with the need far outstripping available funding. With rising sea levels and wetter winters, flood risk is likely to continue to increase into the future. Despite increased investment from central government in recent years, it is widely acknowledged that significantly more funding needs to be found. This is one of the key reasons Defra introduced the “Partnership Funding” approach, which seeks to identify and secure funding from other sources through local choices to support the nationally available Flood Defence Grant in Aid.

The key challenge across Hampshire is to be clear where the risk of flooding is greatest and to have a robust and transparent approach to prioritising the investment that is

secured. It is essential that this approach considers flood risk from all sources and is supported at a strategic level by all the Risk Management Authorities. This will provide the evidence base for negotiations with potential financial contributors. By working together and aligning potential programmes, opportunities for delivering projects with multiple benefits and other potential funding sources can be identified. The Hampshire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy has made a good start in identifying and prioritising local flood risk issues. The next step is to combine this intelligence with that available for other sources of flood risk to enable the whole picture of all risks to be clear.

It is essential that all bodies work together effectively. The Environment Agency has developed a good working relationship with Hampshire CC officers, which includes part time co-location of staff in the Winchester office.

It is important to note that flood risk management is not always about building new flood defences. In many cases, lower cost options such as property resilience measures and working with those at risk of flooding can be more effective.

Flood Defence Grant in Aid is only one source of funding and cannot fund all of the works needed. Other funding sources need to be identified and explored.

2. What role, if any, can partnership working play in helping to attract funding for flood risk management in Hampshire?

Partnership working is essential in reducing flood risk. This must involve the risk management authorities and the communities at risk.

This can only be achieved by strong partnership working with common objectives, where all parties understand each other's concerns, constraints, priorities and desires. By working together we may be able to identify opportunities to tap into new funding sources not utilised before. For example, in many cases, Local Authorities are best placed to access other funding opportunities through development or growth funding.

Aligning strategies, plans and future maintenance programmes should not only look to achieve cost savings but also improve delivery.

3. What can the Environment Agency do to help maximise investment in Hampshire's flood risk management?

The Environment Agency will identify those locations within Hampshire at greatest risk of flooding from main rivers and the sea. We will give an indication of how much potential central government funding (Flood Defence Grant in Aid) could be available to take those projects forward and also the likely amount of partnership funding that would be needed.

We will support Hampshire CC and the other risk management authorities in developing strong business cases to secure Flood Defence Grant in Aid where the proposed works are considered to be of a sufficient national priority. We will do the same for bids of Local Levy to the Regional Flood and Coastal Committees.

We will ensure that we have a mature relationship with all partners so that we can clearly explain the parameters under which we all work, and the impact that this could have on any proposals at an early stage.

At a local level officers will work closely to understand the complexities of all flood risk issues and seek opportunities to deliver contributions even if this is through shared knowledge, services and future programmes of work. By working together we are likely to be much more successful in securing funding from new sources. We can also make better use of our current funding by exploring joint opportunities where multiple benefits exist.

### **Overlapping Responsibilities**

4. The Flood and Water Management Act has made major changes in the division of responsibilities for flood risk management. However, the duties conferred upon the various agencies by the legislation interact and overlap, as do the sources of flooding themselves. What are the key areas of overlap in the opinion of the Environment Agency and what challenges do these pose to flood risk management in Hampshire?

The Flood and Water Management Act sets out the clear responsibilities of each risk management authority. A key principle of the Act was to unite all bodies involved in flood risk management to ensure they cooperate and work together to reduce flood risk from all sources.

We see the potential overlap as a positive driver to encourage partnership working between the various risk management authorities, under the strategic leadership of Hampshire CC. All of the partners involved in flood risk management have knowledge and experience that when brought together can deliver multiple benefits for the communities that we serve.

At a national level The Environment Agency has a strategic overview of all flood risk but this should not be confused with the specific duties for each authority as set out in the Act. It is the Lead Local Flood Authority's duty to lead on local flood risk, including investigating any significant flood incident no matter where the source of flooding originates from.

Rather than a challenge, the changes in legislation should be seen as an opportunity for flood risk authorities to work better together in an integrated manner. The challenge is to ensure we have a common understanding of the risk across Hampshire and a prioritised plan for securing the funding and delivering a coordinated programme of work to reduce the risks.

5. How can these challenges be managed, and what are the key actions that must be taken to improve flood risk management partnership working in Hampshire?

The key to managing these challenges is clear communication and agreeing local principles that work for all risk management authorities. Part of this will be to ensure that all parties have a common understanding of the total risk across Hampshire, the likely funding needed and a clear plan for working together to achieve common outcomes.

The proposed changes to the Hampshire Strategic Flood & Water Management Partnership Board and Technical Delivery Group will be an important step to further strengthen the relationships between all the Risk Management Authorities. It will be important to ensure that members of the Board are of an appropriate seniority within their organisations.

The early involvement of the local planning authorities will also be essential to align our combined flood risk priorities with local planning policies. The relationship between Hampshire CC and their Borough/District/City councils will be very important.

### **Sustainable Drainage**

6. Once the Flood and Water Management Act has been fully enabled, the County Council will be responsible for approving and adopting all drainage systems on new developments. What impacts will this have upon the Environment Agency and its operations

We do not anticipate that this will have much impact on the role of the Environment Agency. We will continue to highlight the importance of sustainable drainage systems, but we will not have any role in adopting and maintaining these systems after they have been constructed. We will become a consultee for the SuDS Approval Board but only for drainage schemes where a main river is affected.

In partnership with the other risk management authorities, we expect to work closely with the SuDS Approval Board to identify areas where flooding as a result of surface water runoff is a particular issue and, where considered a priority, investigate how to reduce flood risk.

7. In what ways can the County Council use this new responsibility to complement the work of other flood risk management authorities – especially, but not exclusively in relation to flood risk management?

The function of the SuDS Approval Board will help in our aim to reduce flood risk wherever possible. National planning policy guidance currently requires there to be no net increase in surface water run-off from a development. We hope that the SuDS Approval Board will, where appropriate, seek opportunities to actively reduce the amount of run-off from a development site where it would positively reduce existing flood risk elsewhere.

There are also significant opportunities for environmental and amenity improvements as a result of well designed and constructed SuDS schemes. The Approval Board have a key role to play in securing these enhancements.

8. In what ways, if any, can the Environment Agency support the delivery of the sustainable drainage approval body function?

Subject to available resources, we can offer our technical support to the SuDS Approval Board to help set it up and assist it in its early operations. We have operated a similar arrangement in assisting Hampshire CC set up its ordinary watercourse consenting team.

We will also highlight the requirement for SuDS approval and the role of the SuDS Approval Board in our pre-planning discussions with developers.

### **Maintenance**

9. Please provide details of any relevant maintenance programme/s your organisation undertakes which is beneficial to flood risk management?

We reduce the risk of flooding from main rivers and the sea by undertaking an annual programme of maintenance work. This work, which is undertaken on a prioritised basis,

includes maintaining existing flood defence assets and clearing vegetation and other debris from rivers to prevent blockages.

Our 2013/14 maintenance programme can be accessed on the Environment Agency web site at the following link <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/floods/109548.aspx>.

In addition to the planned annual maintenance programme, our teams also respond during flooding incidents to keep grills clear and operate our assets.

10. What is the biggest issue in terms of effective maintenance of flood risk management infrastructure/water courses, and what would help address this?

Ultimate responsibility for keeping rivers clear and maintaining their banks and beds rests with the landowner - referred to as the "Riparian Owner". Risk management authorities have permissive powers to undertake work on behalf of the riparian owner if it is considered to be an effective use of public money and funding is available.

The greatest challenge facing future maintenance is delivering an effective programme with increasing pressure on limited maintenance budgets. Prioritisation on a risk basis is the only way the programme of maintenance can be managed. In the future it will be necessary to liaise ever closer with riparian owners, especially in low risk catchments, to encourage them to undertake maintenance on their own watercourses.

Sharing maintenance programmes and how they are delivered between flood risk management authorities should enable further efficiencies to be made.

Flood action groups and the local community need to take ownership of their local flood risk and be encouraged to undertake minor maintenance works. For example, removing leaves from a blocked road grating in autumn prior to heavy rainfall can prevent a surface water flooding incident. Local communities have knowledge of the local flood risk issues in their area and how they can be addressed – this needs to be tapped into by the risk management authorities.

### **Other**

Are there any other comments with regard to flood risk management that you would like to make to the Select Committee?

Thank you for taking the time to respond to the Committee's request, your responses will help Members identify areas for improvement in flood risk management. Please note, as evidence to a Select Committee inquiry, your responses will be published unless you specify that the content is not for publication (see guidance notes).