

Name of Organisation Responding: NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Funding

1. What is New Forest District Council's understanding of the key challenges in obtaining funding for flood risk management in Hampshire, and how might these be surmounted?

Despite an increase in the 2013 spending round investment is still not enough to meet the growing flood risk. Reduced maintenance spending has led to a reduced level of watercourse maintenance.

Partnership funding is increasingly required to obtain grant in aid for FRM schemes. Unless a scheme has a priority score high enough to attract 100% grant funding it can't go ahead without a local or partnership financial top up.

A key challenge in securing partnership funding could be convincing local authorities to pool resources to fund strategic investment in FRM schemes outside their boundaries.

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

Coast protection schemes are subject to the same grant/approval system as FRM schemes so it's worth talking to the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, the Hampshire Coast Protection Authorities and Coastal Groups about their experiences of FDGiA.

3. What can New Forest District Council do to help maximise investment in Hampshire's flood risk management?

We have procured and managed the southern regional beach monitoring programme (and promoted coast protection schemes) for many years, which is substantially supported by grant in aid, and therefore we have long experience of FDGiA procedures and partnership funding models that could help investment planning for FRM in Hampshire.

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 New Forest District Council and what challenges do these pose to flood risk management in Hampshire?

Blocked or obstructed watercourses: The F&WMA transferred enforcement powers from district council level to LLFAs which can cause problems when inspection is undertaken by district councils. Need to clarify procedures appropriate to this situation.

Inspection and maintenance of non-main river watercourses: In the New Forest there are over 2000 km of non-main river watercourses in private ownership, some of which are not well maintained. In the past the Council has undertaken maintenance work, or provided financial assistance to landowners to undertake works, where wider FRM benefits could be obtained. We believe this has made a significant positive contribution to local flood risk

management but greatly reduced resources have now restricted the ability to continue this work. Joint action between NFDC and HCC is needed to prevent the situation deteriorating.

Sharing of information: Overlap of roles, especially relating to inspections, makes it essential to share information in a timely way between the LLFA, the EA and DCs to avoid duplication of effort and inconsistent dissemination of information.

Dissemination of information to the general public: Advice and information for the public needs to be consistent across HCC, EA, water companies and DCs, but in some areas there may be differences in approach between DCs (e.g. sandbag provision) which needs careful handling.

Responding to emergencies: MAFP deals with flood response at a strategic level but DCs as Cat 2 responders need to provide a local input into the plan and take responsibility for its implementation. Again a consistent approach is needed

Environment Agency: Clarification of relationship with the EA concerning surface water issues and development control and its role with regard to Suds Approval Boards.

Designation of structures: DCs and LLFA can both designate FRM structures. DCs may be discouraged from making designations if it involves commitment of additional resources.

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 Hampshire Land Drainage Working Group, which operated from the 1990s to 2008, met quarterly and brought together all the land drainage engineers from the Hampshire Districts plus reps from HCC, EA, Southern and Wessex Water to share information, receive updates, discuss local FRM schemes etc. It would be helpful to recreate something similar, perhaps building on HCC's Drainage Forum, which would encourage more participation and involvement at district level. The various steering groups set up by HCC as it gets to grips with its new role as an LLFA have, of necessity, concentrated on strategies and plans. Once Schedule 3 has been enacted and the SAB properly established a county wide working group open to all relevant organisations and including discussion of local issues would assist partnership working.

Wider sign-up to the Shared Service Agreement and buy-in to the concept of SuDS would strengthen the base for developing partnership working across the County.

A Memorandum of Understanding between HCC, EA, water companies and district councils setting out agreed roles and responsibilities of the various organisations in terms of strategic and day-to-day FRM activities and identifying clearly the necessary lines of communication.

Traditionally FRM authorities have tended to develop information on a piecemeal basis that users can find difficult to access and understand, particularly as there are so many different plans that affect flood risk management. To help improve this situation the Hampshire County Council's FRM website could be developed into a one-stop shop for all types of FRM information including schemes, projects and initiatives from all the FRM bodies and spanning across the range of FRM activities from strategic planning to day-to-day operational matters. As the LLFA HCC should also work with the other FRM

authorities to limit the proliferation of FRM related documents and make them easier to access and understand.

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 New Forest District Council and its operations?

About 90% of the planning applications assessed by the Council's land drainage team are for single properties, extensions, barns, stables, Maneges etc. which fall outside the remit of the SAB. The impact of enacting Schedule 3 next April will therefore have relatively little impact on this work.

However, in accordance with the terms of the shared service agreement with HCC, the LD team will directly support the new SAB by helping to check and assess SuDS proposals from large developments across the County.

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?

Construction of SuDS provides an important opportunity to provide or improve biodiversity and amenity, deal with diffuse pollution and educate local communities about the water cycle and water management. Encouraging developers to engage with LPAs and the SAB at an early stage of planning and, wherever possible, involving local communities in the management or maintenance of SuDS features would help to ensure that SuDS features are regarded as attractive and desirable elements in the local landscape rather than a potential danger to be avoided or fenced-off.

Help to ensure that planning authorities are aware of the pollution issue and other requirements of the Water Framework Directive when dealing with surface water disposal, especially with regard to the elements that do not come under the remit of the SuDS Approval Board. Otherwise these issues may be ignored.

8. In what ways, if any, can New Forest District Council support the delivery of the sustainable drainage approval body function?

*Supporting SAB through shared service agreement.
Commenting on planning applications not yet within the SAB remit but covering the same issues.*

Maintenance

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

The Council used to undertake regular maintenance work on privately owned watercourses but no longer has the resources to operate at this level. For a number of years now the Council has done little routine maintenance itself but has worked with riparian owners to try to ensure that they undertake appropriate and timely maintenance works. However, the Council still retains a small maintenance budget to carry out very minor works that will provide wider benefits, or to take action where ownership of a problem watercourse can't be determined.

Following enainment of critical ordinary watercourses (COWs) by the Environment Agency the Council undertook an annual programme of maintenance and improvement on behalf of the Agency, which brought about a substantial improvement in the operation of these watercourses and a corresponding reduction in flood risk. In 2012, despite the EA being very satisfied with the standard of work achieved by NFDC, maintenance of COWs in the New Forest was transferred to one of the EA's framework contractors.

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

Blockage or flow constriction in open and piped watercourses is the main problem, usually caused by plant growth and/or the accumulation of debris or shingle. Accumulation of debris in and around road gullies, screens and culvert inlets is also a major problem.

Regular inspection and a programme of routine maintenance would eliminate 90% of these problems, as demonstrated by the improvements in functioning of the New Forest COWs brought about by a long-term inspection/maintenance programme.

Other

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

Each year NFDC responds to a substantial number of reports from people who are experiencing drainage problems. Some will be related to foul drainage, highway drainage, main river etc. for which the Council has no responsibility and no powers to take action. These are dealt with by providing the caller with contact details for the relevant organisation that can assist.

However, the majority are related in some way to surface water flow and an engineer will visit the property to determine, if possible, the cause of the problem and provide advice to the property owner. In some cases the Council will undertake small scale improvements if the work required is beyond the capability of the property owner, or if wider flood risk benefits can be achieved. The Council still retains a small revenue budget for land drainage improvements to fund such work.

On average NFDC deals with 150 such reports each year and records them on a database. HCC is informed of problems caused by obstruction of a watercourse in case enforcement action is needed to remove the obstruction. Traditionally NFDC would have taken, or threatened, enforcement action but the F&WMA 2010 transferred this power from district councils to LLFAs.

Although small in scale and often overlooked NFDC believes that this work is fundamental to preventing some grass roots drainage issues from escalating into larger flood risk problems.

If surface water drainage incidents are wholly, or even partly, dealt with by the Lead Local Flood Authority the local District Council may lose touch with what is happening within its district unless very good communications are maintained between the two authorities. In

New Forest District Council all planning applications are examined from a surface water drainage viewpoint and where appropriate conditions are attached. When we look at the applications we check our database via our GIS for local flooding problems, which gives proper support for any conditions we impose. The District Council is concerned that in the future it may no longer have up to date local flood information to work with unless we are kept fully informed of the outcomes of all investigations undertaken by HCC.

Some questions for HCC as LLFA:

- *Does HCC value this local investigation and advice work carried out by some district councils?*
- *Does the disparity in approach to FRM between the Hampshire district councils (e.g. some undertaking flood investigations and some not) make it difficult for the LLFA to have a consistent approach to FRM across the county?*
- *If so, does HCC wish to take over this work from the districts?*
- *Does HCC wish to be informed of all local surface water related investigations rather than just those involving watercourse obstructions?*