

Flood risk management

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

The EEHT Board has received regular updates on flooding when there have been major developments. Board Members indicated that it would be useful to discuss flooding at a time which would enable the development of a longer term strategic approach. DEFRA has announced a review of flood defence funding post 2021. In addition the 25 Year Environment Plan has also highlighted that there will be an update of the national flood and coastal erosion risk management strategy in 2019 looking to strengthen joint delivery across organisations.

The Board has therefore taken the opportunity to invite two speakers along to the meeting to provide a national and local perspective on flooding. Members have the opportunity to raise questions with the specialist speakers and to review the LGA's key lobbying lines on flooding to ensure that we can effectively impact both the funding review and the 25 Year Environment Plan.

Recommendation

That the Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board Members give direction for LGA engagement with government on future flooding policy and funding.

Action

Officers to progress as directed by members.

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Flood risk management

Background

1. Around 5.4 million properties in England are at risk of flooding from rivers and the sea, surface water or both. Annual flood damage costs for the whole of the UK are estimated to be in the region of £1.1 billion. It is not possible to prevent all flooding or coastal erosion, but the impacts on communities can be reduced with effective flood and coastal erosion risk management.
2. The Government committed to investing £2.5 billion in capital funding for flood defences for the period 2015-16 to 2020-21, stating that the six year investment would protect a further 300,000 properties and reduce flood risk by five per cent. Previously funding was allocated on an annual basis only. Revenue funding is allocated for a one-year period only, however maintenance funding was protected by the 2015 Government in real terms at the 2015/16 level (£171 million) and budgets were allocated for each year up to 2019/20, totalling about £1 billion.
3. The majority of the funding for flood and coastal erosion management is through grants from DEFRA to the Environment Agency (EA). The EA maintains existing infrastructure relating to "main rivers" and tidal defenses, invests in new and improved risk management infrastructure and administers a linked capital grant allocations procedure to local authorities and internal drainage boards (IDBs).

Issues

4. Flooding is a major issue for many local authorities across the country. As Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFA's) county councils and unitary authorities have to lead in managing local flood risks (i.e. risks of flooding from surface water, ground water and ordinary (smaller) watercourses). This includes ensuring co-operation between the Risk Management Authorities in their area and taking the key leadership role. However, they do not have direct control over the funding the Government provides and are hampered by additional responsibilities which are not fully funded.
5. The LGA regularly lobbies on a number of flooding issues. The key issue is for capital and revenue funding for flood defence projects to be devolved into a single, place-based pot to allow local areas to support a more diverse set of outcomes. DEFRA has suggested that decisions on which flood defence projects go ahead and when, is already partially 'devolved' to Regional Flood and Coastal Committees (RFCCs). However, allocations are still made according to a number of defined national criteria which focus primarily on protecting people and residential property. Devolving funding could enable local areas to allocate funding for example, to protecting businesses or high value agricultural land which could be vital to support local economic growth ambitions.

6. DEFRA will shortly be undertaking a review to look at how flood defence funding is structured post-2021 (after the current six year £2.6 billion flood defence programme ends). We are lobbying for local government to be a key stakeholder in this review. We must also use this opportunity to explore how we might increase flexibility in the approach to funding for flood defences up to 2021.
7. Land drainage consent fees remain an issue for the sector. Currently the nationally set £50 fee does not cover processing costs. LGA/ADEPT commissioned research shows that the mean cost to process a single land drainage consent application is £250. This means that local taxpayers are subsidising 80 per cent of the cost. The Environment Agency have increased the fees for the land drainage consent fees they process which sets an important precedent. Land drainage fees need to be set locally by Lead Local Flood Authorities.
8. Councils have a new statutory consultee role for surface water drainage. As of April 2015, all major planning applications have to demonstrate the use of sustainable drainage as part of their development. As the Lead Local Flood Authority, many councils are now a statutory consultee on these planning applications. ADEPT commissioned research showed that the average cost of delivering this role is £65,000 for each Lead Local Flood Authority and the new burdens funding from Defra was approximately £13,000. This new statutory consultee role for councils needs to be fully funded.
9. The Chancellor announced in the Autumn Budget 2017 that an additional £76 million will be spent on flood and coastal defence schemes over the next three years. This funding will better protect 7,500 households and boost flood defence investment to over £2.6 billion between 2015/16 and 2020/21. Of this, £40 million will be focussed on deprived communities at high flood risk, boosting local regeneration. This announcement provided clarity on how a proportion of the £700 million additional funding for flood defences announced at Autumn Budget 2016 will be allocated. Further clarity is needed on how the remaining funding will be spent.
10. The 25 Year Environment Plan has suggested some key areas of focus around flooding. It has committed to:
 - 10..1. a 2019 update of the national flood and coastal erosion risk management strategy
 - 10..2. a review of funding needs beyond 2021 (seeking more non-public sector investment)
 - 10..3. the Environment Agency ensuring new developments are flood resilient

- 10..4. and an additional focus on greater use of natural flood management solutions, an increase of uptake in sustainable drainage systems and improved resilience of properties at risk of flooding.
11. Members have the opportunity to discuss these issues with the two speakers who have been invited to the Board meeting.
- 11..1. Alison Baptiste is the Director of Strategy and Investment in flood and coastal risk management at the Environment Agency. She will provide a national overview/perspective of flood risk management.
- 11..2. Jonathan Moxon is flood risk manager at Leeds City Council providing a local perspective on how councils practically deal with flooding.

Implications for Wales

12. Flooding is a policy area which is devolved to the Welsh Assembly. We are in close contact with the WLGA environment team to share policy positions on this issue.

Financial Implications

13. None.

Next steps

14. To be suggested by the EEHT Board.