

## **WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL**

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall on 15 April 2025 commencing at 6.30 pm.

<b>Present:</b>	Councillor Paul Howitt-Cowan (Chairman) Councillor Jacob Flear (Vice-Chairman) Councillor Emma Bailey Councillor Stephen Bunney Councillor John Barrett Councillor Jeanette McGhee Councillor Paul Lee Councillor Karen Carless Councillor Maureen Palmer Councillor Roger Pilgrim
<b>In Attendance:</b>	
Nova Roberts	Director of Change Management, ICT & Regulatory Services
Andy Gray	Housing & Environmental Enforcement Manager
Ele Snow	Senior Democratic and Civic Officer
Molly Spencer	Democratic & Civic Officer
<b>Apologies:</b>	Councillor Moira Westley Councillor Eve Bennett Councillor Trevor Bridgwood Councillor Lynda Mullally
<b>Membership:</b>	Councillor Stephen Bunney was appointed substitute for Councillor Eve Bennett Councillor Karen Carless was appointed substitute for Councillor Lynda Mullally Councillor Jeanette McGhee was appointed substitute for Councillor Trevor Bridgwood

### **37 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

On being put to the vote it was

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 14 January 2025 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

### **38 MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

### **39 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE**

The Democratic and Civic Officer provided an update regarding the invitation to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). It was reported that an invitation had been extended; however, the PCC had respectfully declined to present to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as this was not their standard practice. Members were informed that the PCC and the force Chief Officers delivered annual presentations to each of the District Councils, which were open to all Council Members. Arrangements for this year's presentations had not yet been finalised, as key funding decisions and their implications for Lincolnshire policing remained pending.

The PCC and force continue to engage with Central Government to address ongoing funding challenges. Further updates would be communicated to the Leader of West Lindsey District Council in due course. No additional updates were reported.

### **40 PRESENTATION ITEM - LEAD LOCAL FLOOD AUTHORITY**

The Chairman welcomed Mr. Matthew Harrison, Flood and Water Manager for Lincolnshire County Council and representative of the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) and invited him to deliver his presentation.

A presentation was delivered, which introduced the role and responsibilities of the Lead Local Flood Authority. It was explained that Lincolnshire County Council acted as the Lead Local Flood Authority for Lincolnshire and was responsible for managing flood risks arising from surface water, ordinary watercourses, and groundwater.

The responsibilities of Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) as the Lead Local Flood Authority were outlined, including the development and maintenance of a Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, the conduct of investigations into flooding incidents, and the publication of the outcomes. It was noted that works had been undertaken to manage flood risks from surface water, groundwater, and ordinary watercourses. The County Council acted as a statutory consultee on planning matters for all major developments, maintained a register of assets, and regulated ordinary watercourses outside of Internal Drainage Board areas. It was noted that Internal Drainage Boards acted as agents in these areas under a Memorandum of Understanding.

The presentation highlighted the collaborative efforts of the Lead Local Flood Authority with other Risk Management Authorities, key stakeholders, and local communities to meet statutory requirements. It was emphasised that the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy had been developed through strong partnerships to manage the impact of flood risks on people, businesses, and the environment.

Additional details were provided on how and where flooding should be reported, along with the most effective methods for doing so. The purpose of investigations under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 was explained, along with the criteria for initiating such investigations. The process for logging flood reports was outlined, including discussions with Risk Management Authorities or riparian owners, joint sign-off of reports, and communication with property owners whose properties had been internally flooded.

It was noted that the County Council had no enforcement powers but had worked in partnership with Risk Management Authorities to develop schemes aimed at enhancing future flood protection. Data had been shared regarding flooded properties from 2012 to 2024. Details on Property Flood Resilience Repair Grants, including eligibility criteria and associated data collection, were also provided.

The presentation also included an explanation of the responsibilities of riparian owners. Updates on West Lindsey's flooding issues were reviewed, including a live tracker which had monitored 22 active locations. It was reported that the tracker had been regularly updated with progress, a log of Section 19 recommendations, and records of concluded works requiring no further actions.

The Chairman thanked Matthew Harrison for his presentation and invited Members to comment.

Clarification was sought regarding the status of flood investigations, particularly the inconsistency between investigations marked as "completed" up to 2025, while their overall work status was listed as "ongoing." Questions arose as to whether this meant work would continue indefinitely or if the work had yet to be finished. It was explained that the data available only covered investigations from October 2023 onward, with older data from 2012 to be included later. The "ongoing" status referred to active work or discussions still occurring, which could involve partner organisations or planned actions, not an indefinite process.

It was acknowledged that Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) had no authority to compel action from individuals or organisations once information had been recorded, and some recommendations had not been acted upon for specific reasons. However, any relevant updates from those assigned recommendations would be recorded to ensure transparency. A report example from Market Rasen highlighted the need for additional water storage due to surface water runoff from supermarkets. Although tanks or capture systems were suggested, their implementation was hindered by private land concerns, required investments, and a lack of financial support from relevant parties.

The time taken to progress works identified in the 2023 investigation raised concerns, with frustration expressed by residents over the delays. While modelling exercises were seen as valuable, securing funding for follow-up works remained a significant challenge. Increased national pressure was suggested to facilitate such funding.

Concerns were raised about the number of agencies involved in flood management, with Members feeling that responsibilities were often passed between organisations, leading to inaction. Specific instances were cited, such as a private estate management committee assuming responsibility.

Highway drainage issues were also highlighted, with blocked drains remaining unresolved despite new drainage machinery. A case in Nettleham was mentioned, where it had reportedly taken 18 months to address a drainage issue, prompting questions about the effectiveness of the equipment.

Enforcement of riparian responsibilities, particularly by Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs), was questioned. While IDBs were acknowledged for their work, it was felt that enforcement

powers were not always used effectively. LCC, as the Lead Local Flood Authority, was responsible for consents and enforcement relating to ordinary watercourses, including structures like bridges and culverts. However, enforcement actions were often time consuming and costly.

Regarding highways drainage, it was noted that these responsibilities lay within a separate LCC department, with efforts being made to improve coordination between the Floods and Water Team and highways colleagues. Increased resources had been allocated for highway drainage, with an expanded programme for cleansing and jetting works in place.

Concerns about the online system for Section 19 reports were raised, particularly regarding vague language such as "should consider" rather than definitive terms, which created uncertainty about progress. It was suggested that a lack of updates and prolonged timelines led to dissatisfaction, with reports spanning years without tangible results.

The low uptake of grants was attributed to a potentially complex application process. Feedback from applicants was considered important to improve the process. It was clarified that LCC did not have the legal power to compel authorities to take action but aimed to exceed statutory requirements by providing recommendations for mitigation.

LCC's capacity to address recommendations, especially regarding highway drainage, was questioned due to limited resources. Delays in addressing these recommendations were linked to a high volume of work. Efforts were being made to allocate additional resources, although the grant application process was noted as challenging for flood-affected individuals.

The complexity of flooding in West Lindsey, notably in the Scotter ward, was discussed, with inadequate highway drainage and challenges from the tidal river system being identified as primary causes. The proactive contributions of local IDBs and the farming community in maintaining watercourses were recognised. Concerns regarding riparian owners' responsibilities, especially neglect of watercourses, were raised, with questions about how these issues were managed and whether they were addressed systematically.

The challenges of maintaining tidal rivers were discussed, with balancing environmental concerns and flood protection being noted as complex. Previous trials where sections of rivers were transferred to IDBs for maintenance were considered successful, but any further changes would require government approval.

In relation to planning applications, it was noted that multiple agencies, including the Environment Agency and IDBs, were consulted to assess drainage and flood risks. The County Council specifically focused on surface water runoff, while other agencies assessed drainage capacity.

The importance of feedback in the flood management process was highlighted, with frustration expressed by those affected by flooding due to a lack of updates. Local Councillors were noted as being seen as playing a key role in gathering and sharing feedback with flood management teams, though the process was complex.

Concerns were also raised about reservoirs in Market Rasen, which were designed to manage river water but did not effectively handle surface water, causing public confusion.

The grant allocation process in 2022, which was more localised, was seen as more effective.

The inadequacy of current flood-related grants for homeowners wishing to adapt their properties was raised. Suggestions were made to consider government-backed schemes, such as interest-free loans for retrofitting homes, similar to energy efficiency schemes in other countries. The cost of living crisis was seen as a barrier to homeowners being able to afford such adaptations without financial assistance. The need for a collective effort to engage central government in investigating alternative funding mechanisms was agreed upon.

The importance of pushing central government for improved support, including interest-free loans for flood resilience, was emphasised, with the Flooding Task Force, led by the Floods Minister, suggested as a potential forum for future discussions.

Matthew was thanked for his presentation and for answering questions during the discussion. It was noted that government flooding legislation should be reconsidered, as it remained a significant challenge. The partnership model in Lincolnshire was praised for its effectiveness in flood management.

The importance of diplomacy was highlighted, especially without mandatory legislation. Gratitude was expressed for Matthew's work and the efforts of everyone involved in helping those affected by flooding.

#### **41 FLOOD WORKING GROUP UPDATE**

An update was provided by the Housing and Environmental Enforcement Officer regarding the Flood Working Group, which had been established following previous flooding incidents. It was reported that the group aimed to improve coordination and communication within the Council and with local communities. The Officer highlighted the group's achievements, noting that this was the second update report that had been presented.

Gratitude was expressed to Committee Members for their contributions to the working group over the past 18 months. Their involvement was recognised as essential in managing flooding incidents and ensuring effective communication with affected communities. It was acknowledged that, while the Council prioritised emergency responses, there were ongoing water-related issues that could not always be addressed immediately.

The Council's participation in major flood mitigation projects, including the Humber 2100 Strategy and Fen 2100 projects were outlined. Although the Council was not directly involved in these initiatives, it was reported that local Members participated in partnership meetings to represent the views of West Lindsey residents. The Officer also noted the group's efforts on more localised issues, such as planning and enforcement matters.

Three major flooding incidents were reported: Storm Babet (October 2023), Storm Henk (January 2024), and the incident on 6 January 2025 (which did not have a named storm). The Officer commended the effectiveness of the response framework provided by the Lincolnshire Resilience Forum (LRF) in managing these events.

It was noted that, while the working group did not review all minutes from flood drainage

forums, verbal updates were received from meetings. Despite limited staffing, the Council was reported to prioritise attendance at key meetings to remain informed about flood management issues. Regular updates were also provided in collaboration with Lincolnshire County Council, with specific focus on Section 19 reports and localised flooding matters.

The importance of providing feedback to communities following flooding incidents was emphasised. An example from Stow was highlighted, where repeated road flooding had occurred without impacting properties. The Officer highlighted the need for improved coordination in updating residents, suggesting that platforms such as "Fix My Street" could be supplemented with more localised communication efforts.

It was noted by a Member that, while Fix My Street may provide a response, it was considered insufficient in delivering the type of feedback required by residents. The system was described as overly automated, and concerns were raised regarding the clarity and completeness of the information provided. Reference was made to two recent cases in Middle Rasen where works were marked as completed, although it was observed that they had not been fully carried out. It was emphasised that more detailed and accurate feedback was necessary, as the current system often led to confusion, particularly where works had commenced but not been finished, resulting in misleading communications.

It was acknowledged that West Lindsey District Council had limited direct responsibilities under Section 19 investigations, as most actions did not fall to West Lindsey District Council unless they related specifically to Council-owned land. It was suggested that greater consideration should be given to how the Council's local role could be utilised to ensure that affected residents were informed of any measures undertaken to address flooding concerns. This included not only Section 19 reports but also ongoing maintenance, highway, and drainage improvements, which were noted to contribute meaningfully to flood mitigation.

A variety of planning and enforcement matters were reported to have been raised through the group, often as a result of public referrals or issues identified by officers in planning and enforcement roles. These matters were discussed and followed up as appropriate.

An update was provided on the "Resilient Communities" initiative led by the Lincolnshire Resilience Forum (LRF), with specific reference to work undertaken by West Lindsey District Council's Enterprising Communities Manager. The initiative aimed to enhance the capacity of local communities to act as first responders during emergency events. During major incidents, it was noted that priority was given to properties at risk of internal flooding, while less urgent cases, such as flooded cul-de-sacs, were deprioritised. An example was shared of two communities affected in January, where no properties were flooded but access was severely restricted, leading to several resident enquiries. It was explained that immediate emergency responses would be prioritised, and in such cases, residents might need to rely on neighbours, next of kin, or local parish groups for assistance.

Examples of effective local emergency responses led by parish council sub-groups were shared, highlighting their instrumental role in supporting communities during incidents. It was reported that the LRF had appointed a short-term Community Resilience Officer to engage directly with communities affected by flooding. This Officer was tasked with assisting in the development of local emergency plans, not only for flooding but for a range of potential incidents, including road traffic accidents affecting schools and industrial emergencies such as the Hemswell Cliff fire that occurred in January 2022.

It was observed that recent flooding incidents had been relatively limited in scale, with approximately 20 properties affected in West Lindsey in January 2025. However, it was noted that the resource demands of even small scale events remained significant. The importance of community preparedness and resilience was emphasised, particularly as stretched resources increasingly necessitated initial steps being taken by communities themselves.

Members were reminded that a full schedule of meetings for the Member Working Group had been established. Feedback was welcomed on additional areas for consideration. Appreciation was expressed to both Members and Officers for their ongoing involvement and contributions, with recognition given to the progress achieved and the strengthened organisational preparedness across the district.

A Visiting Member highlighted the need for Officer support in developing neighbourhood and emergency plans, noting past success with guidance from the Senior Neighbourhood Planning Policy Officer. Some parishes had made progress, while others had stalled. It was suggested that the District Council allocate resources, including a dedicated Officer, to support parish councils, especially those recently affected by flooding, with emergency planning. The Officer responded that the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) led emergency planning at the county level and had focused on communities impacted by recent events. While some engaged, others had not. Members were asked to refer communities that could benefit from LRF support. Discussions would be held with the LRF and relevant Council Officers to explore how the Council's resources might complement the county programme.

The Officer explained that a two-year update interval was suggested due to quarterly working group meetings and only one major flood event having taken place in 2025. More frequent reports were unlikely to offer new insights, given limited changes in the Flood Working Group's activities. Members would be updated separately if a significant incident occurred.

In response to a request for the Committee to review emergency planning processes and procedures as a separate matter to the flood updates, the Senior Democratic and Civic Officer clarified that while the Committee was being asked to consider the recommendation set out in the report regarding flooding, it remained open for Members to propose additional areas for scrutiny. It was noted that the Committee's Forward Plan and Work Plan were scheduled for discussion later on the agenda. Members were therefore invited to raise any further topics during that debate. Should any proposals be formally moved, seconded, and agreed upon, they could be added to the Work Plan accordingly. The Officer emphasised the importance of maintaining a clear distinction between the proposed flooding update, scheduled for 24 months' time, and any other topics under consideration.

With no further comments, and upon being proposed, seconded, and voted upon, it was

**RESOLVED** that

- a) the Flood Working Group Update was **DULY NOTED**; and
- b) a further update be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 24 months' time, around April 2027.

## **42 DRAFT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25**

The draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report was introduced by the Senior Democratic and Civic Officer. It was noted that the report was being presented to the Committee for recommendation ahead of its submission to Annual Council in May. An explanation was provided that the report summarised the Committee's activities over the past 12 months and outlined anticipated work for the coming year.

Particular attention was drawn to the operating methodology detailed within the report. Members were invited to submit comments or propose changes to the methodology, with confirmation that these would be considered as part of the wider Constitution Review process, which was also scheduled to be presented to Annual Council.

With no comments or questions raised, and upon being put to the vote, it was

**RESOLVED** that

- a) Members had given consideration to the content of the draft annual report, and the Operating Methodology, with no comments or requests for amendment; and
- b) the annual report be supported for submission to Annual Council.

## **43 FORWARD PLAN**

It was noted that the Committee could utilise the forward plan to identify items for pre-decision scrutiny. It was advised that a proposer, a seconder, and a majority vote would be required for the item to be included in the committee work plan. Otherwise, it was confirmed that the forward plan was presented for noting.

Further to earlier discussions, a proposal was made for the Committee to review resilience and emergency planning in approximately 12 months' time, as a separate item from the scheduled flooding update. The Chairman expressed support for the proposal, recognising it as a worthwhile initiative for follow-up and acknowledging the substantial amount of work involved.

With no further comments, and having been moved, seconded, and voted upon, it was

**RESOLVED** that the Committee review resilience and emergency planning in approximately 12 months' time.

## **44 COMMITTEE WORKPLAN**

The Officer reported having liaised with the Director of Public Health regarding the 2024 Annual Report. It was confirmed that Professor Derek Ward and Councillor Woolley would be attending the Committee meeting scheduled for 24 June 2025. Additionally, the Progress and Delivery Quarter 4 Report, along with the Summary of Year-End Performance for 2024-



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25, was confirmed for discussion at the Committee meeting on 29 July 2025. No further updates were provided at this time.

With no comments or questions, the Workplan was **DULY NOTED**.

The meeting concluded at 8.04 pm.

Chairman