



Belfast City Council (Shadow)

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Flood Alleviation Update Report
Date:	23 rd January 2015
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will be aware that Belfast has been impacted by a number of serious flooding incidents since 2005, in particular in 2012, and the Council had identified a number of flooding areas of particular concern. Following the serious flooding in June 2012 Members agreed that work be commissioned to allow the Council to develop a better understanding on the most significant flood risk areas in the city and to identify what additional measures would be needed to alleviate those risks. It was agreed that this work would be undertaken by the Council in conjunction with the three main drainage agencies; DRD Roads Service (now Transport NI), Northern Ireland Water and DARD Rivers Agency. More details on the findings of this research report by URS are attached in Appendix 1
1.2	There has been considerable progress in addressing flood alleviation in the city since June 2012 and the purpose of this report to Committee is to highlight some of the main improvements (including those which are planned but not yet completed) and the outstanding issues mentioned in the research report, including the lack of progress in establishing a scheme for individual property protection.
1.3	Members will recall that Rivers Agency drafted a business case for such a scheme almost a year ago and the Chair of this Committee wrote to both DARD and DFP in February 2014 seeking clarification on the proposals, finance, timeframes and administrative arrangements for the scheme and welcoming early discussions on the implications of the proposed scheme for councils. The scheme is still under consideration by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

2	Key Issues
2.1	Flood Alleviation Measures The number of government departments and agencies with responsibilities for flood alleviation makes it difficult to establish a single process that covers all the issues involved in improving the flood resilience of the city. However since the URS Report and a number of other reports published following the June 2012 flooding there has been considerable investment and much work done to alleviate flooding in Belfast. For example, phase one of the Connswater Community Greenway project and the flood defences at Victoria Park have been completed. This ensured that the Orangefield and Sandhill areas did not flood during recent flooding

	<p>events. Phase two of the project is underway and will provide additional protection around the other culverts feeding into the Connswater and Loop rivers. A number of other significant schemes for Finaghy, Greystown and the Upper Malone area have also been launched and are due to commence next spring. These schemes will use a number of the mechanisms suggested in the report to deliver integrated solutions to flooding.</p>
2.2	<p>Coastal flood plans are well progressed and NIE, BT and NIW have taken action to protect their infrastructure in flood risk areas. In particular there has been considerable work to improve the resilience of the NIW pumping station at Sydenham. There is also a proposal to upgrade this pumping station to increase its capacity; and a further proposal to rebuild it in a new location.</p>
2.3	<p>The research report outlines other investigative and improvement work throughout the city including replacement gullies and manholes at Knocknagoney, repairs to collapsed sewers at Tennent Street and Tildarg Street, upgrading of river grilles at Knock Dual carriageway and replacement of a storm sewer pipeline in the Castlewood Manor area. The Report identifies the York Street Interchange Scheme as an example of a collaborative multi-agency approach having the potential to provide significant flood alleviation benefits for Belfast.</p>
	<p>Innovative Approaches</p>
2.4	<p>Looking forward the report identifies that potential exists within Belfast for the implementation of a wide variety of Sustainable Drainage Solutions (SuDS), alongside traditional drainage methods, to help alleviate flooding. SuDS are forms of surface water management, which aim to be more sustainable than traditional piped systems, reducing both the risk of flooding and pollution. The report points to the potential for the Council to work with the Storm Water Management Group, the Rivers Agency and others to develop a green infrastructure plan for the brownfield sites in the city. It also recommends the alignment of planning processes within the city and consideration of how Belfast City Council Masterplan or new development plan can influence flood alleviation in line with Planning Policy Statement 15 (PPS15).</p>
	<p>Individual Property Protection Scheme</p>
2.5	<p>The URS Report makes it clear that establishing a culture of self-help and resilience in neighbourhoods is an important aspect of flood protection and it refers to the business case developed by Rivers Agency for an individual property protection scheme. The Report suggests that such a scheme has significant potential to empower the public to help themselves, to reduce the likelihood of their homes flooding and to prevent financial hardship. It was proposed that this scheme would replace the current Flooding Hardship Payment Scheme, which the Council administers on behalf of the Department of the Environment (DOE) and it was anticipated that Rivers Agency would engage the Council regarding the administrative arrangements for the introduction of this scheme. However nearly a year on the business case for the scheme is still with DFP.</p>
	<p>Recent Flooding</p>
2.6	<p>There were three significant severe weather events in October and November of 2014 which resulted in 49 properties in Belfast receiving a £1000 payment for severe inconvenience. It was interesting to note that 48 of those payments were made for the flooding on 16th October; an event which occurred very suddenly with a 'Yellow' severe weather warning and an advisory email from the Met Office issued less than two hours before the flooding occurred. This differed from the event of 6th November for which there was an 'Amber' warning in place well in advance and the public and drainage agencies were much better prepared to cope with the severe weather. The Council delivered sandbags throughout the day in advance of the rain and a number of river grilles and gullies in flood prone areas were cleared. There were many factors associated with these events but observation would suggest that advance warning and a coordinated and collaborative preventative approach in November did help to mitigate the impacts of the heavy rain and prevent internal flooding on both 6th and 13th November, when only 1 property was flooded internally.</p>
2.7	<p>It should be noted that a significant number of the properties in south Belfast which flooded during recent events will benefit from the Finaghy, Greystown and Upper Malone schemes</p>

	<p>mentioned above. However the Report identified a number of other areas across the city where there was no particular reason for the flooding beyond the drains not being able to cope with the extreme conditions. Many of these areas are on the NIW DG5 Register. This is a register of properties at risk from internal flooding in a 2 in 10, 1 in 10 and 1 in 20 year return period rainfall event. Capital investment projects are identified to remove as many of these properties as possible from the register but it is a regional register with over 200 properties on it and the proposed schemes are obviously subject to funding and approval from the Utility Regulator. Again the number of houses on the DG5 register and other properties where there is no remedy available to prevent flooding during extreme weather emphasises the need for a robust and accessible individual property protection scheme.</p> <p>Outstanding Issues</p>
2.8	<p>A number of the operational flood planning groups have been collapsed down and merged with groups within the new regional resilience structures to achieve more streamlined and connected planning. However there is still a need to consider merging a number of the groups at a strategic level to establish a single forum or overseeing organisation to harmonise the work that is currently being undertaken by the drainage agencies and effectively connect with other organisations such as the Council to support working towards a strategic and comprehensive integrated planning approach to flood alleviation for Belfast. Such an approach could include developing similar innovative schemes to those mentioned in the research, for example developing a mechanism whereby funding could be made available to members of the public incentivising them to install sustainable drainage systems within their property boundary (similar to installing solar panels).</p>
2.9	<p>The Research concludes that it is difficult to establish a single process that will cover all issues involved in trying to improve the flood resilience of Belfast and it makes it clear that all flooding cannot be prevented. It is disappointing therefore to note that the Rivers Agency scheme for individual property protection has not progressed beyond DFP as the investment created by the proposed scheme, together with the planned area improvement schemes has the potential to have a significant impact on improving flood alleviation in Belfast. Individual property protection is particularly important at this time of government cuts with the DOE proposing to withdraw the scheme of emergency financial assistance. The current scheme provides the £1000 payments to householders and enables the Council to engage contractors to assist with the cleanup of properties and other related services.</p>
2.10	<p>An update report was provided at the December meeting of the Emergency and Severe Weather Working group who recommended this to be considered at the next Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.</p>

3	Resource Implications
3.1	<p>The current DOE budget consultation proposes to withdraw the scheme of emergency financial assistance which could impact on the Council's ability to support the response to and recovery from flooding in the city. The Council currently claims back costs for deploying contractors for cleanup of properties, additional working out of hours and contractor costs for sandbag deliveries, conference calls, and such like. There is no money in the revenue estimates to cover these costs.</p>

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	No particular considerations

5	Call In
5.1	This report is subject to call in

6	Recommendations
6.1	It is recommended that Members note the report and the significant progress that has been made to reduce the risk of flooding in areas of Belfast since June 2012. Members are also requested to note some of the barriers that still exist to achieving an integrated approach flood alleviation planning in the city.
6.2	It is recommended that the Committee agrees to write to the Finance and Personnel Minister with regard to the urgent need for a robust and accessible individual property protection scheme to prevent flooding; and to encourage the establishment of a single strategic overseeing group for Belfast to address integrated flood alleviation planning and other significant issues highlighted in this report.

7	Decision Tracking
Siobhan Toland	

8	Key to Abbreviations
SuDS – Sustainable Drainage Systems DFP- Department of Personnel and Finance	

9	Documents Attached
Belfast Flood Alleviation Improvement Works Significant Issues Report May 2014	