

SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

Minute of special meeting of the Scrutiny and Performance Committee held in the Council Chambers, 2 High Street, Perth, on Wednesday 22 November 2023 at 10.00am.

Present: Councillor C Stewart, Bailie A Bailey, Bailie C Ahern (substituting for Councillor C Shiers), Councillors K Allan, S Carr, E Drysdale, A Forbes, M Frampton (substituting for Councillor I Massie), W Robertson, F Smith, and J Welch.

In Attendance: T Glen, (Chief Executive); C Mailer, Director (Strategy, People and Resources); B Renton, Executive Director (Communities); S Devlin, Executive Director (Education and Children's Services); A Brown, M Butterworth, F Crofts, S D'All, P Dickson, H Hope, D Littlejohn, L Potter, E Ritchie, F Robertson, S Skene, S Terras and J Watson (all Communities) L Simpson, A Taylor, G Fogg, L Colledge, K Molley, A Brown and M Pasternak (all Corporate and Democratic Services).

Apologies: Councillors I Massie and C Shiers

Councillor C Stewart, Convener, Presiding.

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Convener welcomed all those present to the meeting and apologies were noted above.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

3. DEPUTATIONS

In terms of Standing Order 13, the Committee agreed to hear deputations in relation to item 4 – Review of Extreme Weather Events in Perth and Kinross in October 2023.

4. REVIEW OF EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS IN PERTH AND KINROSS IN OCTOBER 2023

There was submitted a report by the Chief Executive (23/232) reviewing the arrangements in place over the weekend of 6-8 October 2023 in relation to the flooding close to the North Inch, Perth.

B Renton, Executive Director (Communities) delivered a slide-based presentation on the extreme weather events which occurred in Perth and Kinross on 6-8 October 2023.

Councillor B Brawn, Ms A Burns, Mr B Ross, and Councillor P Barrett addressed the Committee and answered Members' questions.

The Clerk, on behalf of Ms G Kindness, read a written deputation.

THERE WAS A 10 MINUTE RECESS AND THE MEETING RECONVENED AT 12.05PM.

The Convener asked for a timeline of the events to be circulated to members of the Committee.

In response to a question from Councillor E Drysdale regarding Met Office improvements in forecasting, B Renton advised at one of the Local Resilience Partnership meetings on the Sunday, it had been stated that predictions had been for the weather to move quicker than it had across Perth and Kinross on the previous evening. B Renton added that the reason that had been suggested for the unexpected change in weather had been due to the incredibly warm weekend down South and therefore the weather pattern stayed longer over Perth and Kinross, despite the amber weather warning and met office modelling. B Renton added that while there had been improvements in forecasting, further work could be undertaken to see what happens at a particular point in time. B Renton confirmed that officers are still assessing the reasons for the change in weather over the weekend of 6-8 October 2023.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor E Drysdale regarding if a review had been undertaken on the Perth Flood Scheme Operating Manual since 2001, S D'All advised that the manual had been in place since the scheme had been initiated. S D'All added that throughout the course of operating the scheme there had been minor tweaks made to the manual but there hadn't been any fundamental changes undertaken as tide levels and flood gate sill levels wouldn't have significantly changed. B Renton confirmed that as part of that the Improvement Plan there would be a commitment to undertake a review of the manual with SEPA due to the change in weather pattern and the impact on residents within Perth and Kinross.

In response to a question from Councillor J Welch regarding the design of the Flood Protection Scheme and if the Scheme is still fit for purpose, M Butterworth confirmed that flood defences are still sufficient and there had been no evidence to suggest that water had gotten through any of the closed gates. However, officers do accept that some of the gates hadn't been closed as quickly as they should have been.

In response to a question from Bailie A Bailey regarding formal criteria to help drive the risk assessment to define whether an Incident Management Team should be stood up, B Renton confirmed that the Incident Management Team didn't meet until later on the Sunday based on the information received on Sunday afternoon regarding Barossa Place, however, over the weekend of 6-8 October, the Incident Management Team were in constant contact to share information and knowledge on activity to be undertaken.

In response to a question from Councillor E Drysdale regarding yellow weather warnings as the trigger for closing the South Inch gates in Perth, S D'All confirmed that when investigating the flooding events that occurred in August 2020, findings had highlighted that the mechanism for the flooding in Marshall Place was due to surface water flooding that had impacted Craigie Burn and the South Inch. S D'All confirmed that previously the trigger for closing the gates had been the same throughout the Scheme but it was established at that point that there would be a risk to properties from surface water flooding from Craigie Burn onto the South Inch if the gates hadn't been

closed. An alteration was made to the Scheme to close the South Inch gates on a receipt of a yellow warning for Perth City.

Councillor J Welch stressed the importance of having a stronger and more robust contingency plan in place in the case of a failure in the infrastructure. Officers agreed that the action would be considered as part of the Improvement Plan.

In response to a question from the Convener on why the South Inch gates hadn't been shut on 10 September 2023 when a yellow warning had been issued, S D'All advised that the yellow warning had been issued on the Saturday morning and it hadn't been picked up by the standby team, so the gates hadn't been closed. However, officers did monitor the conditions of the rainfall and because the rainfall had decreased and the weather conditions started to improve, there wasn't a requirement to close the gates at that point.

In response to a question from Councillor A Forbes regarding the Bellwin Scheme, F Crofts confirmed that Perth and Kinross Council are liable for the first £797,790 and anything beyond that would be borne by the Scottish Government.

In response to a question from Bailie C Ahern regarding areas that don't have a Resilience Group, H Hope confirmed that 40 communities throughout Perth and Kinross have active Community Resilience Groups and work had been underway to engage with a further 8 communities. H Hope confirmed that an area where a Community Resilience Group was not in place, the response would be conducted by the Council with Partners from the Tayside Local Resilience Partnership in the form of the Fire and Rescue Service, Police Scotland, and other colleagues.

In response to another question from Bailie C Ahern regarding communication with members of the community who do not use social media, B Renton confirmed that in an event such as flooding, information would need to be shared quickly and the most efficient mechanisms are via the press or through social media. B Renton confirmed that communication with communities had been a work in progress and different methods continue to be looked at.

In response to a question from Councillor A Forbes regarding a vulnerable persons register, B Renton advised that Perth and Kinross Council do have separate registers for vulnerable people within Housing and within Health and Social Care. B Renton confirmed that the two registers are kept separately due to data issues. Councillor Forbes suggested as part of the review, to look at extending the registers to include all vulnerable people and help reduce any gaps in the process. H Hope reemphasised the importance of developing Community Resilience Groups across the whole of Perth and Kinross to help reach all vulnerable people during an emergency.

In response to a question from Councillor E Drysdale regarding support received from Aberdeen City Council Customer Contact Centre, S D'All advised that Perth and Kinross Council provide Aberdeen City Council with a protocol on what should be done regarding calls received on certain issues. S D'All added that when the first contract with Aberdeen had been initiated, they were provided with plans and maps of the different settlements within Perth and Kinross. S D'All confirmed that this could be reviewed as part of the process. In response to a question from the Convener regarding the process on how information received from calls to the Contact Centre would be escalated, S D'All confirmed the Aberdeen Customer Contact Centre would contact an

officer from the Roads Maintenance Partnership who would send the right person on the ground to deal with the query.

In response to a query from Councillor K Allan regarding 15 out of 16 calls answered by the Council's Customer Service Centre on Sunday 8 October, A Taylor confirmed that the one unanswered call had been an abandoned call after a matter of seconds, and the resource had been in place for that call to be answered.

A Taylor confirmed that data from Aberdeen City Council Customer Contact Service on the hourly breakdown of number of calls, repeat calls and the average waiting time of calls on the weekend of the 6-8 October would be provided to members within the subsequent report.

Councillor K Allan queried why the flooding team didn't start to close the gates earlier. M Butterworth advised that protocols should have been followed however, given the circumstances on the evening, very experienced officers made the decision not to close the gate based on the information they had received and the resources in place. It had been predicted at high tide that the water level for the following morning would stay the same or be less. M Butterworth confirmed that by the early morning the weather conditions had gotten a lot worse, and it was too late. Officers are assessing what happened overnight but do accept that the late closure of the gate had impacted some properties.

The Convener queried why the squads were not sent to prioritise all vulnerable residents at North Inch and Commercial Street before attending Perth Harbour. M Butterworth advised that the officers dealing with the events took a risk-based decision on the information and resources they had in place and headed to Commercial Street and Perth Harbour.

In response to a response from Councillor W Robertson regarding the idea of introducing a hydraulic system to close the gates, S D'All advised that there would be significant cost implications in introducing a hydraulic system, but it could be looked at as part of modernising the Flood Protection Scheme in the longer term.

Councillor E Drysdale queried if there had been any communication with Perth and Kinross Council over issues with the SSE Hydro dams infrastructure from the Saturday night into Sunday morning. B Renton advised that the current protocol involves information from SSE renewables being shared initially with SEPA. B Renton added that PKC officers were involved in discussions with SSE renewables on Monday 9 October to see how the Council can be involved earlier in the process. B Renton confirmed the issue would be looked at as a matter of urgency, so that the Council are aware of the amount of water entering the system at Pitlochry.

The Chief Executive suggested that a session with colleagues from SSE and SEPA be arranged to provide Elected Members with a greater understanding of the roles, protocols, how information would be shared, and for organisations to understand the resource implications in closing the gates. B Renton added that a session should hopefully strengthen the collaborative work with organisations moving forward.

The Committee agreed to postpone discussion on Sections 7-9 of Report 23/232 to the Scrutiny and Performance Committee on 31 January 2024.

Resolved:

- (i) The impact on residents and businesses as a result of the severe weather experienced across Perth and Kinross area over 2023, be noted.
- (ii) It be noted that there will be a further detailed flooding report to look at the impact and contributing factors.
- (iii) It be noted that a further detailed flooding report will be produced on the impact and contributing factors.
- (iv) Members from the Community Resilience Groups, and other community members be thanked for their commitment and hard work, in responding to incidents.
- (v) In addition to the activity outlined in the Improvement Plan in Appendix 2 of Report 23/232, the Committee agreed to the following actions within the plan:
 - An update on the Improvement Plan be submitted to future meetings of the Scrutiny and Performance Committee to see progress in activity.
 - To provide funding to communities to support resilience in terms of both training and equipment.
 - To form a clearer and more robust contingency plan in case of a fault within the infrastructure.
 - To be able to overlay data of vulnerable individuals onto areas of impact during emergencies.
 - Invite representatives from SEPA, SSE and Scottish Water to attend a future forum with Elected Members.

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