

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

Meeting:	Environment & Economy Scrutiny Sub-Committee
Date:	27 September 2004
Subject:	Flooding in Harrow
Responsible Chief Officer for review	Director of Professional Services – Urban Living
Relevant Portfolio Holder	Environment and Transportation
Status:	Part I
Ward:	N/A
Enclosures:	Appendix 1 – Key Words and Definitions

1. **Summary**

- 1.1 This report is a response to Members request to a report on flooding in Harrow.

2. **Recommendations:** The Sub-Committee is asked to

- 2.1 Consider whether to undertake an in-depth review of flooding in Harrow

3. **Relevance to Corporate Priorities**

- 3.1 Flooding is a key element of the Council's priority of 'enhancing the environment in Harrow by keeping the Borough clean and attractive, by promoting higher environmental standards and by bringing about more sustainable transport activity.'

4. **Policy Context (including relevant previous decisions)**

- 4.1 At their meeting of the E&E on 19th April 2004 Members of the Sub-Committee noted that flooding was an important issue in some areas of the Borough. Members felt that more information was required before a decision was taken on whether to undertake an in-depth review. It was agreed that officers be requested to submit a report on flooding to the September meeting.

5. **Background Information**

- 5.1 Responsibilities for drainage in Harrow are split between Thames Water Utilities Ltd, Environment Agency, The Council and thousands of private individuals.

Public sewers are controlled by Thames Water and constitute approximately 60% of all drains, sewers, watercourses and rivers. Private drains and sewers are the responsibility of the users, which are mainly private individuals. The Environment Agency has powers for Main Rivers and an over arching supervisory duty for flood defence with respect to all watercourses. The Council has extensive interests in non-public sewers etc. as Highway Authority, Local Land Drainage Authority and as private owner.

- 5.2 Maintenance and repair of Main Rivers and Ordinary Watercourses is the general responsibility of riparian owners although both the EA and the Council have permissive powers under land drainage legislation to undertake this work. Both authorities implement these powers within the borough.
- 5.3 The Environment Agency has classified 365 homes, 1 school, 1 nursery, 14 commercial properties, 1 retirement home and 12 roads in the borough as being at high risk from flooding from Main Rivers alone.
- 5.4 Flooding in the borough is not restricted to Main River and can be from Ordinary Watercourses, Public Sewers and Highway Drains. It is estimated that flooding from all sources potentially affects more than 1000 properties and over 100 roads, depending on the severity of the storm. Flooding on this scale has happened borough wide in the past, most notably in August 1977 and May 1988 when Harrow was hit by very severe storms. Although not as severe, extensive flooding has occurred in 1992, 1996, 2000 and recently on 3rd & 9th August 2004.
- 5.5 Although flooding has a major environmental impact there is no statutory duty to improve surface water sewers, drains or watercourses in order to prevent flooding. However, failure to maintain can lead to claims in the civil court for damages due to negligence.
- 5.6 It is often difficult to determine the actual cause of flooding as the surface water drainage system is mostly underground and acts as a single entity, in that problems with one section influences the operation of another. During the recent floods on 3rd & 9th August 2004 some public sewers surcharged to such an extent that water was flowing out of the highway gullies rather than flowing into them. The perception of the public is that the Council's gullies were blocked when, in reality, the problem is with the sewers owned by Thames Water.
- 5.7 Due to the fragmentation of responsibilities for surface water drainage in many cases the Council has limited ability or power to influence the causes of flooding.
- 5.8 The maintenance of the highway drainage and ordinary watercourse systems is a priority for the Council in terms of flood prevention.
- 5.9 In the event of a flood event emergency response procedures are put into place with officers on call who mobilise the watercourse cleaning and gulley cleaning contractors.

5.10 Currently there are major projects being developed to relieve flooding in Harrow sponsored by Harrow, the Environment Agency and Thames Water:

- ***Hatch End Flood Alleviation*** – a project sponsored by Harrow and the EA to relieve flooding in Hatch End primarily in Hatch End Broadway, Hillview Road and Hillview Close and the Avenue
- ***Silk Stream Flood Alleviation*** – a project sponsored by the EA and London Borough of Barnet to relieve flooding in Harrow and Barnet
- ***Camrose Avenue Sewerage Network Improvements*** – a project sponsored by Thames Water for the relief of foul and surface water flooding in Camrose Avenue, Roch Avenue, Methuen Road area.

6. **Consultation**

6.1 Consultation will be sought should members decide to review flooding.

7. **Finance Observations**

7.1 Finance observations will be sought should members decide to review flooding.

8. **Legal Observations**

8.1 Legal observations will be sought should members decide to review flooding.

9. **Conclusion**

9.1 There are flooding problems in Harrow and various agencies are working to relieve the problems despite the difficulties caused by the fragmentation of responsibilities. Effective maintenance of the Council's highway and watercourse drainage systems helps prevent exacerbation of flooding problems from blockages, collapses and other defects.

10. **Background Papers**

10.1 None

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