

Update on Cleaning and Drainage of the Borough's Gullies and Related Flood Problems

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REASON FOR REPORT

This report has been produced to provide an update on the cleaning and drainage of the Borough's gullies and related flood issues. The Committee requested that this update include information on what the Council is doing to address issues of climate / weather change.

OPTIONS OPEN TO THE COMMITTEE

1. To note the update
2. To request further clarification on the cleaning and drainage of the Borough's gullies

INFORMATION

Gullies

Background

Hillingdon Borough has in the region of 37,000 road gullies throughout the road network all designed to take away surface water from the carriageway. To achieve the discharge of water, the gullies are connected by pipe work in one of three ways; by connection to soakaways, by connection to a nearby water course or directly into a surface water main.

The responsibility of the Council lies with the gully itself (provided that is on a Council-responsible road), the associated pipe work connection, the soakaways and some water courses. Other water courses are the responsibility of the Environment Agency or private land owners with surface water mains being the responsibility of Thames Water Ltd.

Resources

The Borough has two gully cleaning machines which are each manned by two operators. Both machines are in daily operation carrying out duties such as the yearly cyclic cleaning of gullies on the highway, cleaning of gullies on Council Housing land and investigating reported drainage problems.

Recent Flooding Issues and causes

In the main the Borough was not severely affected by the recent heavy rainfall compared to other areas of the Country, however, there were a number of isolated flooding issues that required action by the Highways Drainage Team and the Highways Standby out of hours Crews.

Some soakaways became full to capacity and were extremely slow to release water into the ground due to the high level of the water table following the constant amount of rain.

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This problem prevented some gullies discharging water with ponding occurring in some isolated areas of carriageways.

Nearby water courses became swollen not only with the amount of water falling in the Borough but also as a result of run off from high-level ground upstream. Some fallen tree debris caused flow problems. These again prevented gullies from discharging the water with some back flow which resulted in isolated ponding of water in carriageways.

Surface water mains were unable to cope with the amount of water required to be discharged and backlogs occurred again causing isolated flooding issues. Thames Water responded to requests to attend locations, however, at one stage became so overwhelmed that they refused to take any further calls unless it was related to immediate flooding of property or danger to lives. There are a number of problems with the surface water mains infrastructure which suffers from silting and tree root infestation that results in capacity issues.

Debris consisting of leaves and the like was also washed into gullies causing blockages and preventing water from escaping. These issues were fairly wide spread but again only caused isolated ponding of water on some carriageways.

Responses

In the main the flooding issues were confined to areas in the south of the Borough where there are lower lying areas and a number of water courses. There were areas where swollen water courses did flood some roads and also encroached into gardens. No roads were totally impassable. Highways responded to calls and provided sand bags to protect residential properties in imminent danger of flooding. They also responded to calls to flooded areas, investigated the reasons and where possible cleaned drainage systems and sucked up ponding water to prevent further flooding. Highways purchased and filled around 4000 sand bags with a further 1000 held back in reserve should they be needed. Around 1500 sand bags were deployed to areas in the Borough.

Officers worked with the Council's Flood Management Officer (FMO) who was able to monitor the various areas that were affected and liaised with the Environment Agency and Thames Water.

Development

The Council's FMO is collating all information on ditches, water courses and affected areas in order to put together a Flood Management Plan. This will assist in identifying responsibilities and what preventative measures can be undertaken in the future.

Climate / Weather Changes

In response to the wider issues surrounding flooding in the Borough, officers have provided the following information.

Civil Protection Perspective

The Council has well developed and rehearsed civil emergency plans that enable it to respond to any emergency in an efficient and effective way, often in partnership with the wide range of local and regional professional partner agencies. In addition to the Council's

generic civil emergency plan, there are a number of specific emergency plans which include, but are not limited to, flooding and adverse weather (cold, heat and high winds).

All the plans focus on the response to an emergency once it has occurred, rather than the work completed by other officers which focuses more on pre-emergency phase of reducing the risk to the Council and our residents.

Sustainability perspective

For a number of years there has been advice that Local Authorities need to be prepared for a changing climate but it has not been clear exactly what this means. Officers are aware that flooding and drought may be more common but this does not mean that the Borough will be suddenly inundated with weather that has never been seen before. The recent floods could be attributed to a changing climate, however, events like these are managed within the Council's existing plans that officers are currently working on. Similarly, with regards to drought, RESPOC recently heard how the Council is looking to save water and to reduce the pressure on water supplies. This is something that the water bodies and the Environment Agency are also required to respond to.