



## Belfast City Council

**Report to:** Health and Environmental Services Committee

**Subject:** **Belfast Flood Risk Stakeholder Forum**

**Date:** 18th January, 2010

**Reporting Officer:** Suzanne Wylie, Head of Environmental Health, Ext 3281

**Contact Officer:** Valerie Brown, Environmental Health Manager, Ext 3301

### Relevant Background Information

In November 2009, the Committee received a report on flooding events which had occurred over the summer and autumn of 2009 when, on two occasions, there had been significant out of sewer flooding resulting in extensive sewage contamination of residential streets.

The report emphasised the importance of a multi agency approach in developing plans to minimise the risk of flooding in Belfast and referred to the work carried out by RPS consulting engineers, engaged by the Council to map the various flooding hotspots in the city and to both identify possible underlying causes and potential short and long terms solutions. This work has now been completed and is being taken forward in a number of ways, i.e.:

- It has been passed to the Rivers Agency as the 'competent authority' for the purposes of implementing the requirements of the European Floods Directive;
- It has been used as the basis of discussions with other agencies responsible for flooding responses, including the Roads Service and Northern Ireland Water and copies have been provided to both these agencies;
- It has been used to help the Council's Emergency Team to identify the hotspots where multi-agency co-ordination is required to reduce the risk of flooding should severe weather warnings be in place;
- The maps have also been used as the basis of discussions with local Elected Representatives, who are now also informed through a texting service of severe weather warnings, when flooding is a real possibility.

The Rivers Agency has, under the new European Floods Directive, been tasked with developing strategic flood risk management plans with the participation of other agencies, and it is intended that this will initially happen in the Belfast area. To take this forward the Agency and its governing Department, the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development, have attempted to establish a Stakeholder Group, involving all of the relevant key agencies.

**Key Issues**

The Floods Directive has now been transposed into local legislation known as the Water Environment (Floods Directive) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009. These Regulations place a statutory duty on Northern Ireland Departments, District Councils and Northern Ireland Water to exercise their relevant functions in a manner which secures compliance with the Directive. The Rivers Agency is charged with developing a Flood Risk Management Sub Plan for Belfast by 2015.

The Director of Health and Environmental Services, together with the Head of Environmental Health, met with the Chief Executive of the Rivers Agency on 3rd December to discuss the establishment of a Belfast Flood Risk Stakeholder Forum. It is believed that the establishment of such a Forum will assist with the development of the Flood Risk Management Sub Plan for Belfast and that it will provide an effective vehicle for ensuring the facilitation of public participation as required by the European Floods Directive.

Following the meeting, the Chief Executive of the Rivers Agency has written to the Director, formally inviting the Council to confirm its participation in the proposed Stakeholder Forum. A copy of the letter is attached as Appendix 1. The Rivers Agency anticipates that the Forum will meet four times per year and the input from the various stakeholders will be used to inform the Flood Risk Management Plan.

The Rivers Agency has also requested the Council's assistance in identifying, agreeing and making contact with the relevant non departmental stakeholders. The Agency wishes to promote a joined up approach between itself and the Council and has suggested that a co-chair arrangement is developed for the Stakeholder Forum, between the Council and the Agency.

The letter from the Rivers Agency also acknowledged receipt of the RPS consulting engineers report and cited it as a good example of the level of information exchange and assistance sought within the spirit of the Regulations.

**Resource Implications**

Participation in, and support to, the Stakeholder Forum, as outlined above, can be met within existing resources.

**Recommendations**

The Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the letter received from the Chief Executive of the Rivers Agency and
2. Agree to the Council's participation in the Stakeholder Forum and the development of a co-chair arrangement between the Council and the Rivers Agency

**Documents Attached**

Letter from the Chief Executive of the Rivers Agency

**Decision Tracking**

Suzanne Wylie will update the Committee on further developments with the Stakeholder Forum.