

PROPOSAL FOR SINGLE TIER FLOOD DEFENCE COMMITTEES: ENVIRONMENT AGENCY CONSULTATION

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report brings to Members' attention a consultation outlining the Environment Agency's proposal for Single Tier Flood Defence Committees in Anglian region. If accepted, this would replace existing flood defence committee arrangements from April 2005, subject to the enactment of the Water Bill currently going through Parliament.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Following a Flood and Coastal Defence Funding Review by DEFRA, it has been recommended that Single Tier Flood Defence Committees (STFDCs) are created in England, rather than the current two tier system. The Environment Agency have now drawn up proposals for consultation in response to this and are now consulting with key stakeholders on this prior to submitting their preferred option to DEFRA by late March 2004. The consultation with stakeholders runs until 31st December 2003.
- 2.2 Flood Defence Committees are executive committees of the Environment Agency through which the Environment Agency is required to discharge its flood defence and land drainage functions in the region. Their work includes:
- Preparation of programmes of work
 - Determination of funding requirements
 - Consenting of works
 - Provision of planning advice
- 2.3 In the future, flood defence will be funded largely by direct government grant, rather than the current system of a levy on local authorities. However STFDCs are likely to retain powers to raise supplementary levies which could be used to fund schemes that are deemed to be locally important but which do not attain high enough national priority to qualify for national funding.
- 2.4 Currently there are nine Regional Flood Defence Committees (RDFCs) in England – one in each Environment Agency Region. The

Environment Agency's Anglian Region falls across two government regions, the East of England and the East Midlands, plus some very small areas of the South East and London. In addition to the RFDC, there are five Local Flood Defence Committees (LFDCs), each with 15 Members:

- Essex LFDC
- Norfolk and Suffolk LFDC
- Great Ouse LDFC
- Welland & Nene LDFC
- Lincolnshire LDFC

2.5 Details of the Agency's consultation are outlined in Appendix 1.

3 OFFICER COMMENT

3.1 The new proposals will replace the existing Essex Flood Defence Committee, which is one of the five local Committees operating in the Anglian Region. The current committee covers the area of the whole of Essex, including the unitary authorities of Thurrock and Southend, about one third of the county of Suffolk, a small part of Cambridgeshire, and a small part of Havering (one of the London Boroughs) – which in total represents a population of around two million people.

3.2 The current Essex Flood Defence Committee has operated effectively for many years providing local accountability. It has also invested well over a period and, overall, the flood defences in Essex are well maintained.

3.3 As acknowledged in the Consultation report, given the diversity of the Region and the fact that it has the most vulnerable coastline, the greatest land area at or below sea level, and a significant diversity in the size and complexity of river catchments, it would seem appropriate that any revised arrangements reflect the existing skills, knowledge and expertise which have been built up over a period. Consequently, it is felt that in devising any new single tier proposals, the arrangements for Essex should mirror as closely as possible the boundaries of the current Committee, particularly given its effectiveness over a period.

4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The arrangements for flood defences and the decisions taken by any body who oversees such arrangements clearly has environmental implications for the District.

5 RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 It is proposed that the Committee considers the implications of the consultation report and supports the principle of an option which mirrors as closely as possible the retention of the existing Essex Flood Defence Committee.

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