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Flood and Coastal Erosion Committee meeting: 23 May 2024: minutes

Minutes from the Flood and Coastal Erosion Committee
Meeting No 16, 23 May 2024. Mott MacDonald offices, Cardiff.

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Attendance

Committee Present

Martin Buckle (MB) Chair
Andrew Stone (AS) Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC
Darren Thomas (DT) Pembrokeshire County Council
Paul Blackman (PB) Wallingford Hydro Solutions
Anne-Marie Moon (AMM) JBA Consulting
Jeremy Parr (JP) Natural Resources Wales
Mike Wellington (MW) Waterco
Natalie Haines (NH) Mott MacDonald
Geraint Edwards (GE) Conwy County Borough Council
Karen Potter (KP) Open University
Dominic Scott (DS) Dwr Cymru – Welsh Water
Jean-Francois Dulong (JFD) Welsh Local Government Association
Robin Campbell (RC) Arup

Welsh Government (WG)

Tracy Goode (TG)
James Jewell-Edmonds (JJE)
Michelle Delafield (MD)

Other Speakers

Merissa Fallas (MF) Natural Resources Wales
Mark Groves (MG) Natural Resources Wales

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Owen Griffiths (OG) Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC
Catrin Evans (CE) Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC

Apologies

Catherine Wilson (CW) Cardiff University
Paul Williams (PW) NFU Cymru

1/2. Apologies and introductions

The Chair gave the apologies and introductions were made.

3. Declaration of interests

RC noted work on behalf of Arup relating to agenda items 7, 8 and 10; AMM noted work on behalf of JBA Consulting regarding the National Infrastructure Commission for Wales (NICW) report.

4. Minutes of the meeting 22.02.24 and matters arising

MB noted the minutes and matters arising; nothing was raised by Committee.

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5. Chair's announcements

The Chair made the following announcements:

“ I would like to update the Committee on the meetings and events that I have attended since our last meeting. Over that period, I have attended a number of consultative meetings and events with colleagues from the National Infrastructure Commission for Wales and their consultants, in progressing work on their “Managing Flood Impacts in 2050” Review.

“ In March, I met with colleagues from the Environment Agency, from the English Severn and Wye Regional Flood and Coastal Committee and from Natural Resources Wales, in order to develop a better understanding of the cross-border work in preparing a Severn Valley Water Management Strategy. We will be hearing more about this later on the agenda.

“ Also in March, I attended the quarterly meeting with the Chairs of the English Regional Flood and Coastal Committees. The meeting had a particular focus on partnership working and on surface water flooding. My next meeting with them will be in June.

In March, I also met with the National Flood Forum to share with them our Resources Report, and to explore the potential for collaboration in moving it forward. In addition, I met with the Town and Country Planning Association, who work on behalf of the Environment Agency across England to provide training on flood risk management for planners, and on planning for flood risk management practitioners.

“ In April, I had another in my series of meetings with representatives of the Law Commission, to provide an update on the Minister's response to our Legislative Change report, and to discuss how we might further collaborate in taking it forward.

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In April, I also met with representatives of Mercury Theatre Wales. They are a small Theatre Company, supported by the Wales Arts Council, working primarily across South and West Wales. They work with the community to create new pieces of theatre around community issues. Their most recent production was on homelessness. They are now shifting to an environmental focus and are keen to explore the issues around sea level rise and coastal adaptation.

“ Earlier this month, I met with the chair of the Flood Risk Management Committee within Natural Resources Wales. We particularly focused on the lessons learned from the Section 18 reporting process, and how it might be further improved in the future.

Looking ahead, in June I will be attending the next meeting of the Flood & Coastal Risk Programme Board. I am also looking forward to meeting with the new Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, to review our annual report, and to discuss priorities for our forward work programme.” ”

6. Items from the regional groups

DT provided an update on behalf of the South West Regional Group – the Swansea and Carmarthen Bay group have worked on a reporting template; they met in April and are continuing to work on the Section 18 (S18) report. DT also noted concern about a lack of contact from Cardiff & Vale Group.

DS provided an update on behalf of the North West Regional Group - met in April, with updates on Local Strategies (LS) from LAs – late summer / early autumn is the expected date for publication. Workshop sessions were held – partnership working was the focus of one. A review of the ToR and succession planning was undertaken – the group talked about bringing in junior

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representation. MB asked for fuller feedback on partnership working work at next resources meeting. TG asked on LSs – had contact from LAs on what the process is and have reinforced the need to factor in time to review, brief the Cabinet Secretary and to approve at the WG end. DS noted that most LAs are close to the approval process – JFD to confirm. TG – to flag, we would need the post-consultation draft; DS offered to act as a conduit, along with other group Chairs, if needed.

Action

DS to liaise with Regional Group Chairs to establish LS timescales.

DS has also indicated that he will continue as Chair in the interim, with a view to succession planning being undertaken soon. AS provided feedback on the process of LS development from an RCT perspective. MB noted ‘you get back what you put into them’. DT noted the Pembrokeshire view – LSs are very helpful in a tighter budgetary space. MB noted the need to be smart and get the best value out of the process.

The South East Group update was provided by AS – the SuDS regional group met in March; dropped down to technical officer level. AS will send out an email on strategy prior to Programme Board; commented that the process is not necessarily clear for LAs regarding the LS drafting process – there needs to be recognition that LAs need to go through many levels of governance before submitting to WG, which is a laborious process. On revenue funding, things are settling down, but some LAs are struggling to prioritise FRM funding (as WLGA are aware). OWCs (ordinary watercourse consenting fees) now need to be reviewed; they are still at the 1991 level. Fees for SABs are currently being reviewed by Water Branch, which is welcomed. No issues flagged with OBC work in SE Wales.

JP made a general comment on pressures regarding resources and budgets; in NRW there has been a 10% reduction across the board of all activities in response to this. The Strategies are useful, forward-facing documents; however, it takes NRW time to review these across Wales. Furthermore, following the North Wales induction workshop, NRW will look to expand this across Wales, which is a good example of collaborative work with Welsh Water and the WLGA.

JFD highlighted the WLGA work on OWC fees back in 2016, noting the increased figure, but this is now also eight years out of date. There is also a planned review of planning fees this year. MB asked TG to take the OWC fees issue back to Flood Team.

Action

TG to raise the issue of OWC fees with WG Flood Branch.

NH however noted that this is enshrined in legislation and may require legislative change to amend – we need to look at the way Flood Risk Activity Permits have gone as an example. Whilst the ‘fee’ is the issue, a broader review of the legislation may be prudent to be on the agenda; MB noted that this should be placed on the agenda for the Policy & Legislation Sub-committee.

7. Taff Catchment Strategic Flood Management Plan – Merissa Fallas, Project and Programme Delivery South East Team Leader, and Mark Groves, Project Executive, Natural Resources Wales

MF and MG presented on the Taff Catchment Strategic Flood Management Plan.

Questions / discussion

AS – can you confirm the timescales on the phases noted? MF – the initial ambition is to have this ready by 2026; however, financial and resource pressure impacted, and we are likely to complete task and finish groups in the next 18 months.

DT – how does this interact with politicians / how do they get involved in this process? MF – everyone is invited into the T&F groups. We send updates regularly to the Senedd, quarterly. Also linked into RMAs – we access councillors via this route.

JFD – this is an exciting project, and it is good to see a catchment approach. Who is the owner of the plan? What are the governance arrangements to interact with stakeholder organisations? MF - initially we planned a formal approach, however, the issue at present is that we do not know exactly what we are offering, which has impacted upon governance arrangements.

The way that the plan is adopted will be one of the recommendations. We are looking to set up a catchment management group. Resources are also a big issue for us – the work has been impacted by named storms, which puts

pressure on our resources.

KP – have you got the third sector involved? Noted ‘Project Groundwater’ in England, which overlaps, and offered to provide detail to MF. MF – we have been involved with third sector and are engaged via T&F groups; we would welcome any further detail.

TG – on community resilience, I am connected in with the joint-research programme - noted ‘Measuring Community Resilience’ project within this. I will go back and check on status of this, with offer to provide details.

Action

TG to provide further detail on the ‘Measuring Community Resilience’ project.

NH – highlighted the British Red Cross report, noting demographic issues in the catchment.

MF – our equality assessment highlighted issues such as this in our initial review and is being considered as part of the work. We are working with equality team to ensure there is no unconscious bias in the work undertaken.

MB – noted that Powys County Council and the Brecon Beacons national park are not listed partners, which may be a potential oversight. MF noted the initial assessment found that these organisations, whilst bordering the catchment, are not included in it. MG – they are not currently part of core group, but this can change. MB – noting the scale and size of the operation, should WG be involved? TG – will take this back to the team.

Action

TG to flag the Taff Catchment Strategic Flood Management Plan with WG Flood Branch.

AMM – how do you ensure the right people are involved in the T&F groups? MF – there needs to be a consistency across these groups and ensure there is continuity in those who attend.

JFD – it would be useful to capture the learnings of your work to devise a lessons learnt resource which can be shared if the catchment approach is to be adopted more widely across Wales. MF noted that a lessons learnt document will be produced.

8. Upper Severn Valley Water Management Strategy – Mike Adams, Arcadis, Severn Valley Strategic Lead on behalf of the Environment Agency

Item was not covered and will be revisited in a future meeting.

9. Flood Risk and Hazard Methodology for Assets – Owen Griffiths, Flood and Water Risk Manager, and Catrin Evans, Senior Flood Risk Officer, Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council

OG and CE presented on Flood Risk and Hazard Methodology for Assets in RCT.

Questions / discussion

MW – do you take into account health and safety in the modelling (for responders), and have you considered the use of AI? OG – the command team have information which they will share with the team, i.e. the area is a high risk, caution needed. AI has been considered, but there is work to be done. AS – the ICT team have created a tool which can geographically map calls – decisions are based on current information which needs to be interpreted as intelligence. This system has been designed to simplify the process so that a senior officer may be able to take decisions in lieu of flood officers.

RC – is there anything that feeds into this process which may flag catastrophic events? OG noted the use of FRAW risk scores; we used Storm Dennis outcomes as a measure of the impact of FRAW. Further work to be done to refine the system. JP – this is a really good example of collaboration around data. It's good that this can be used to identify opportunities of how the tool can be used in future and the potential. TG – on wider benefits – are you connected with S19 reporting? OG – it has fed into S19 via the intelligence gathered. MB – can you see this benefitting your processes in putting bids for smaller schemes? OG confirmed. MB – also could this data be used in considering planning applications? OG – again, yes this can be utilised.

10. Managing Flood Impacts in Wales 2050: Review by the National Infrastructure Commission for Wales – Update – Jeremy Parr

JP provided an update on the Managing Flood Impacts in Wales 2050: Review by the National Infrastructure Commission for Wales.

Questions / discussion

RC - the workstream reports are quite different; the Commissioners are looking to be radical and challenge WG, and not looking to tinker with the existing system - RC noted upcoming workshops. This aim is to set out the ambition, with a view to form stepping stones to work towards in the future, which is a long-term view on the issue. AMM – Commissioners will do their own reporting based on the feedback. RC - the 4 workstreams are evidence which informs the Commissioners in authoring their review; they are looking to the Committee and PAG to provide advice.

JFD – some of the recommendations are quite radical; are there ways we can support WG in embedding the outcome of the NICW report into the National Strategy? I am conscious that this work should not 'sit on a shelf', but adequate resource should be secured to action the recommendations. JP – we need to be aware of the level of ambition the Commissioners may have balanced against the actual available resource.

AMM – has there been discussion of NICW recommendations in the sub-groups? MB – yes, there has been in the Resources Sub-committee (RSC), in which it has become a standing agenda item; the Policy & Legislation Sub-committee (PLSC) ought to agenda this for the next meeting. AS – at the last PLSC meeting, we agreed that there is a need to see the NICW report before

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further discussion.

11. Sub-Committees

11.1 Membership – To consider appointments to Sub-Committees (SCs).

MB noted vacancies to fill - PW has agreed to fill the Resources SC role; RC has filled the gap on the Research SC; JP has agreed to act as Chair.

MB offered thanks to JFD in the work undertaken on the sub-committees (SCs), noting his impending plans in stepping back from role. JFD – looking to appoint replacement on 17th June. We will then work to establish WLGA representation the Committee and SCs.

11.2 Minutes – To receive the minutes of the following meetings:

11.2.1 Section 19 Sub-Committee – 29th February 2024;

DT – the first meeting took place on 29th February. Initial meetings covered the ToR. TG provided an overview of the status of S19 work, with reference to work undertaken by Professor Evans. Also noted that DEFRA have an ongoing project to establish national guidance in England – we are hoping to piggyback on this. A key issue is the work undertaken by Professor Evans – we plan to get the Professor along to the SC to explain the work.

TG has had sight of the draft DEFRA report and plans to share with the wider

stakeholder groups; once consulted and captured feedback, we will provide further information, likely in July. Initial feedback indicates there is some consistency with the findings in the Professor Evans report. JP requested that NRW be involved with this work.

Next meeting has been arranged for 3rd July.

11.2.2 Research Sub-Committee – 7th March 2024;

JFD – the ToR has been formally approved. We hope to strengthen what is in place with the R&D programme. We considered the fact that there is no dedicated funding from WG, which would be subject to a business case. There is an opportunity to tap into ‘Environment Platform Wales’ and to work with universities in Wales, with a view to develop a ‘community of practice’ around FCERM. We are trying to identify the current value of the programme, and how do we know that RMAs and users are making use of the findings of the R&D programme.

TG noted action to investigate the process of potentially using a PHD scheme, or other routes towards funding. There is a need to identify what the gaps and priorities are, and to develop a specification, prior to taking next steps on this front. JP noted PHD funding provided by EA for certain English universities on flood work; to be picked up at next SC meeting.

NH expressed concern that there is no longer a forum / conference in Wales which allows for this work to be shared. In England ‘Flood and Coast’ enables lots of information to be shared amongst practitioners; there is a gap in Wales (due to the change of approach in current Wales Flood Conference). RC – these events are very useful in bringing ‘siloes’ areas together to discuss.

Action

TG to enquire as to Cabinet Secretary conference plans.

11.2.3 Resources Sub-Committee – 11th April 2024;

MB noted Alison Kitchener's attendance, who provided an update on the presentation given at the last full Committee meeting. Work is being undertaken towards having a report available to share with WG in July. Next RSC meeting brought forward to June so that she may share her preliminary thoughts prior to this. JFD provided an update on the plan for a workforce survey, to be trialed in Neath Port Talbot. Under the community engagement element, KP brought attention to an interesting report on Flood RE. Discussions continue around partnerships and some of the thinking DS has developed on a potential partnerships action plan.

11.2.4 Policy & Legislation Sub-Committee – 17th April 2024, and progress update.

AS – the meeting partly focused on the role of the Law Commission (LC). MB gave a detailed update on Proposal 1. On the DEFRA assets research project – the report is due early summer; there is a huge amount of potential cross-cutting elements. There is a lot of work to be done digging into elements of legislation. To disseminate this information, a proposals tracker has been developed.

MB – on the LC, they now have an officer based in Wales. They are also in the process of establishing an office in Cardiff. They remain interested in doing a piece of work on FRM law, which got through the first sift of their 14th programme.

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JFD – to note, the review of the marine licensing exemptions under the Coast Protection Act 1949 will ensure a response is put forward. MB – it would be useful to know when the public consultation will begin.

12. Welsh Government FCERM Update - Tracy Goode, Resilience and Research Manager, Welsh Government

TG provided a Welsh Government FCERM Update.

13. Reports

13.1 Flood & Coastal Erosion Committee Annual Report – To approve the report.

MB offered thanks for the feedback received, noting the document is in the draft stage and will be finessed prior to formally sharing wider. Noting the feedback from Committee members – consistent views, such as frustration in the lack of capacity in responding to the Committee’s advice and the slow pace. Common threads include the need to do more in engaging with RMAs and holding those which are not stepping up to the plate to account as a Committee.

Furthermore, feedback highlighted collaborative work, included the S18s, which involved much work and progress with NRW. The NICW collaboration has also tied up a lot of time, which naturally has constrained progress in other areas.

Looking ahead, the next meeting is in September, where we usually roll forward our work programme by twelve months – several comments from members

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suggest we give this more time than we have previously typically done.

13.2 Securing a Sustainable Future White Paper: Environmental Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets for a Greener Wales – To confirm the response submitted to the Welsh Government.

MB offered thanks for the comments submitted within the agreed timeframe. MB noted the need for discussion with WG officials on the topic. Further noting the new Committee, a large part of which will be overseeing NRW. Further discussions will need to be had regarding the preparation of legislation and at the operational level of the plans.

JFD noted extensive discussions with LAs; WLGA will ask LAs to review everything within their corporate plan. The ambition is there, but there needs to be realism within the ambition. MB noted that this has been a long-standing commitment, to have a body like this in place. There will be many different perspectives on how 'light touch' this should be. It will be interesting to see how this new body will regulate the FCEC.

13.3 Committee Work Programme - To consider the report of the Chair on the update of the Work Programme.

MB provided an update on the Committee Work Programme. MB proposed to shift several of the target dates back to the September meeting, including the proposed work programme for the Research and S19 Sub-committees, along with the update on the work programme for the PLSC.

14. A resolution to exclude members of the public

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where publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be discussed

This resolution was agreed.

15. Wales Climate Resilience Strategy – Michelle Delafield, Climate Change Division, Welsh Government

MD presented on the Wales Climate Resilience Strategy. Committee members offered feedback on the presentation.

16. Any other business previously notified to the Chair

None.

17. Date and venue of next meeting

Thursday 5th September 2024, Microsoft Teams (virtual).

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