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| London Councils’ Transport & Environment Committee | | | | | | | |
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| Surface Water Update | | | | | | Item no: | X |
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| **Report by:** | Martijn Erkelens  Georgia Goddard | | **Job title:** | | Surface Water Project Officer  Principal Policy and Project Officer | | |
| **Date:** | 18 October 2023 | | | | | | |
| **Contact Officer:** | Georgia Goddard | | | | | | |
| **Telephone:** | 020 7934 9540 | **Email:** | | Georgia.Goddard@londoncouncils.gov.uk | | | |
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| **Summary** | This report updates Members on the activities of the London Surface Water Strategic Group, which was formed after the significant surface water flooding incidents in July 2021. After a brief introduction, the report covers the Group’s activities to date and current activities. |
| **Recommendations** | Members are asked to note and comment on this report. |

**Background**

1. Surface water flooding is the main flooding risk to London, as noted in London’s Risk Register[[1]](#footnote-2). It occurs when the drainage system is overwhelmed, and rain cannot get into local drains, sewers, or watercourses. It can be caused by intense rainfall and/or blockages within the system. It is difficult to predict when and where surface water flooding will occur due to uncertainties in timing, location and intensity.
2. Surface water flooding is also difficult to manage due to London’s built-up nature and infrastructure. Much of London is covered in impermeable surfacing which means rainwater cannot soak into the ground. It is served by a Victorian combined sewer system, which was built for a drier and less urban city with a much smaller population.
3. Due to the unpredictable nature of surface water flooding, it is difficult to provide an accurate warning or alerts system. Although mapping and modelling has given a sense of where flooding may occur, it is less clear to what degree this has effectively been communicated with both partner organisations and residents in risk areas so they can understand the level of surface water flood risk that they face. After the 2021 surface water flooding events, it also became very clear that most residents and businesses do not know how they should respond and what they might be able to do to reduce the risk of flooding to their property. This is an increasing problem, given the frequency of intense rainfall events is likely to increase in coming decades due to the effects of climate change.
4. On the 12th and 25th July 2021, London experienced intense rainstorms that overwhelmed the drainage systems and led to extensive surface water and sewer flooding, affecting homes, businesses, health infrastructure and transport networks. 24 boroughs were impacted by these incidents, with the worst impacts felt particularly in parts of East and North London. More than 1,000 properties have been reported as flooded, though the actual number is likely to be significantly higher as there is suspected to be significant under-reporting.
5. Several reviews and reports that were commissioned to learn the lessons from the July 2021 flash floods identified a lack of city-level strategic coordination of surface water flood risk, as well as a need for improved collaboration between key organisations. It was determined that a London-level approach was required to address challenges that could not be solved by local Flood Risk Management Schemes.
6. As a result, the London Surface Water Strategic Group (LSWSG) was formed. The LSWSG provides strategic oversight for a programme of improvements to address surface water flood risk. It comprises senior-level representatives from Risk Management Authorities, including London’s Lead Local Flood Authorities, Environment Agency, London Fire Brigade and Thames Water, as well as other organisations with a flood risk management or strategic governance role, such as the Greater London Authority, Transport for London and Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee. A full list of members is as below:

* Environment Agency – London Area Director
* Mayor of London – Deputy Mayor for Environment and Energy
* Transport for London – Chief Health, Safety and Environment Officer
* Thames Water – Strategic Partnerships Director
* London Fire Brigade – Assistant Commissioner, Operational Resilience & Control
* Thames RFCC – Independent Member
* Chair of London Councils’ Transport and Environment Committee
* London Borough Representatives: three vice chairs of London Councils’ TEC and another two from the Thames RFCC

1. A London Surface Water Officers Group has also been formed, comprised of representatives from the same organisations as the London Surface Water Strategic Group and a full time Secretariat and Project Officer have been employed to focus solely on the work of the Group.

**Activities to date**

1. The LSWSG is keen to oversee a tangible difference to surface water flood management in London, and as such, is seeking to prioritise action.
2. Recommendations from the commissioned reviews and reports in 2021 were consolidated as part of the Annual Monitoring Report 2023 into 6 distinct workstreams: Governance, Strategy, Funding, Evidence, Communications and Resilience. The Annual Monitoring Report shows the progress of all actions (full report can be found [here](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-07/Annual%20Monitoring%20Report.pdf)). Of the 47 recommendations (12 of which were common across all reports): 14 have been completed; 25 are in progress; and 8 have yet to begin.
   * The Governance workstream has now completed all actions so the working group has been closed.
   * The Resilience workstream has been adopted by the London Resilience Forum who are completing separate activities with regards to responding to a flooding event.
3. The LSWSG will oversee the delivery of these recommendations going forward. Each workstream has a lead member from LSWSG as well as lead officer from the Officers Group.

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| **Workstream** | **LSWSG Lead** | **Officers Lead** |
| Strategy | Steve Thompsett, Thames RFCC Independent Member | Alex Nickson, Thames Water |
| Funding | Nevil Muncaster, Thames Water | Sam Nicholson, Environment Agency |
| Evidence | Lili Matson, Transport for London | Vicky Boorman, Greater London Authority |
| Communications | Cllr Cem Kemahli, Transport and Environment Vice Chair | Polly Walton, Environment Agency |
| Resilience | Charlie Wood, Environment Agency | Fiona Mair, London Resilience |

1. The following notable milestones have occurred since 2021:
   * A strategy and vision workshop to bring together Risk Management Authorities and other stakeholders was held on 29 Jun 2022.
   * A flash flood awareness campaign aimed at the most vulnerable basement residents was developed, with leaflets distributed to 45,000 basement properties in June 2022 and July 2023.
   * The London Surface Water Strategic Group was set up and has met in December 2022, April 2023, June 2023, 13 October 2023 and now meets quarterly.
   * A scope for the London Surface Water Strategy has been developed and approved by the London Surface Water Strategic Group.
   * Consultants, from WSP, have been procured to develop the first strategy and action plan.
   * Advisors to the Strategic Group have been recruited. These representatives are appointed based on a combination of their role and/or their personal experience. Their primary responsibility is to advise the Strategic Group on any matter pertaining to their area of expertise or organisation that is relevant to surface water flooding.
   * A [webpage](https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/environment-and-climate-change/climate-change/climate-adaptation/surface-water-flooding/londons-surface-water-strategy) for this work has been created, hosted by the GLA, to publish the Strategic Group minutes and Annual Monitoring Report.
   * The first [Annual Monitoring Report 2023](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-07/Annual%20Monitoring%20Report.pdf) was created to track actions against recommendations adopted by the LSWSG.
   * Thames Water have produced data sharing agreements and eleven boroughs have signed up to these across the Thames Water Region. A data Sharing Agreement has also been established to share details of vulnerable people during an incident between Category 1 responders, but this does not extend more widely.

**Current Activities**

1. **Chair recruitment.** Following the unsuccessful recruitment process of summer 2023, the job description and candidate pack were revised according to feedback received to be more appealing to prospective candidates. The role was re-opened at the beginning of October with interviews due to take place in November.
2. **Branding**. Following the visioning workshop completed in the summer of 2022, WSP have consolidated feedback from the 27 boroughs represented at that session and suggested names and branding options to explore further. The Strategic Group will make a decision at its meeting on 13 October.
3. **Vision and objectives.** Following the visioning workshop completed in the summer of 2022, WSP are developing draft proposals for a vision and objectives, which again will be agreed by the LSWSG. These will remain flexible and adaptable as engagement is taking place and as the strategy evolves.
4. **Strategy**. WSP are developing a geospatial approach methodology to assess how flooding might be analysed and understood in different parts of London. This approach involves layering different types of data onto specific locations and will form a robust database with which to conduct flood modelling. It will require assessment of receptors (units impacted by flooding, for example, number of homes), vulnerability (for example, spread of basements), exposure to flooding and ultimate consequences, both in human and financial terms.
5. Following this, WSP plan to evaluate the delivery constraints of flood management actions in different parts of London. This analysis will guide exploration of alternative funding options, partnership working models, and the alignment of infrastructure delivery programs. This will produce solutions pathways, which will take account of critical social and environmental factors such as biodiversity and social wellbeing. Enabler actions will also be identified, including data requirements, tools, and support networks.
6. Through the engagement process and collaboration across the Working Groups, the viability of large-scale changes will also be explored, to address resource challenges, unlock funding, facilitate collaboration, and consider innovative multi-outcome investments.
7. The broader timeline for strategy development is as below:

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| **Project Phase** | **Period** | **Key Engagement Dates** |
| **Planning Phase**  Project planning and collation of information and insight to inform the development approach | July 2023 – Sep 2023 | Project progress update to Strategic Group – Oct 2023 |
| **Discovery**  Generation of insights through stakeholder engagement and evaluation of the current flood risk management environment | Sep 2023 – Nov 2023 | Stakeholder engagement - Late Oct 2023 to Late Nov 2023  Feedback on engagement outcomes – Late Nov 2023 |
| **Development**  Technical investigations and development of the strategy recommendations | Sep 2023 – Mar 2024 | Focused Engagement Sessions – Dec 2023 to Early Jan 2024  Project progress update to Strategic Group – Jan 2024 |
| **Delivery**  Preparation of the strategy documents and supporting information, and support of the launch | Apr 2024 – Jun 2024 | Draft Strategy Presentation Strategy – Early Mar 2024  Draft Strategy Feedback & Consultations Engagement – Late Mar 2024  Project progress update to Strategic Group (inc. approval of final Strategy) – Apr 2024  Final Strategy Presentation – Late Apr 2024 |

1. **Engagement**. A Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Plan is being developed to guide how the Officer Group and Working Groups collaborate with WSP to ensure RMAs and other stakeholders can shape the strategy. Stakeholder engagement will take place over November and focused engagement sessions will take place over December and January – see above table for reference. The plan will remain adaptable and flexible as discussions with stakeholders develop.

**Next steps**

1. The launch of the name and branding of the Surface Water group will take place this Autumn as part of Flood Awareness Week in November.
2. We will update TEC on this work in December 2023 as part of a broader flooding update.

**Recommendations**

1. Members to note the report

**Financial implications**

No financial implications recorded.

**Legal implications**

No legal implications recorded.

**Equalities implications**

A key outcome of the visioning session of Summer 2022 was that boroughs wanted to make sure the strategy was inclusive of all residents, especially those who are most vulnerable. This is now reflected in the current vision and objectives. The geospatial approach as it stands aims to assess vulnerability of residents, on the basis of protected characteristics such as age, as well as geographical characteristics such as the number of residents in basements. Officers will be fully engaged in the process as it develops.

1. Mayor of London, Surface Water Flooding: https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/environment-and-climate-change/climate-change/climate-adaptation/surface-water-flooding [↑](#footnote-ref-2)