	AGENDA ITEM 6
	PSEG/08/17
Committee:	**Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee**
Date:	**23 February 2017**
Corporate Information Services and Communications Support to Frontline Services	
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Purpose of report

To receive a briefing on the support provided by the Council's Information Services (IS) and Communications Teams to the Flood and Water Management Team.

The briefing has been arranged in response to recommendation 5 contained in the Committee's 'Third Party Responsibilities and Flood Enforcement in Essex' Scrutiny Report.

Background

In November 2015 (Minute 8) the Committee endorsed the Scrutiny Report 'Third Party Responsibilities and Flood Enforcement in Essex'. The scrutiny report contained five recommendations, which were duly sent to the relevant Cabinet Members. The Report can be accessed via the following link: Scrutiny Report

Alternatively a full copy of the Scrutiny Report may be found on the Essex County Council website www.essex.gov.uk   From the Home Page, click on 'Your Council', then on 'Meetings and Agendas', then on 'Public Documents' followed by 'Scrutiny Reports'. Finally, select the scrutiny reports from the list reports that have been published.

As part of the Committee's scrutiny review attention was drawn to the relationship between a frontline service, which in this case is the Flood and Water Management Team, and some of the corporate services they have to rely on to deliver that service.

An extract on raising public awareness from the Scrutiny Report itself is attached at Appendix A to this report.

Raising public awareness about third party responsibilities is an integral part of the County Council's programme for rolling out its flood management programme, and it was evident that it will rely quite heavily upon the effectiveness of the internet, online services, and social media.   Overall the Task and Finish Group (TFG) that undertook the in depth investigation, was satisfied that its conclusions were based

upon well evidenced information. However, in the matter of IS and Communications support it was considered that further investigation was required before any final conclusions or recommendations could be reached. Consequently the following recommendation was agreed:

> 'That the Task and Finish Group (TFG) conduct a short supplementary scrutiny review of the IT and Communications support provided for the delivery of frontline flood management services using the website and social media, with the aim of reporting to the Committee early in the New Year (2016).'

The TFG did not proceed with the supplementary review as originally envisaged due to the Committee's resources having to be redirected elsewhere. Nevertheless Councillor Walsh, the Committee's Chairman at that time, sought further information from the various services in order to consider how the recommendation could be satisfactorily addressed. It was proposed to the Committee that rather than establishing a TFG to conduct a short review it would be worthwhile engaging its full membership by commissioning a briefing to raise awareness of how corporate services may be supporting the Flood and water Management Team in practice now and in the future. It was intended that the briefing should be focussed around the delivery of a frontline service rather than strategic IS and Communications matters that would fall within the remit of the Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee. (Minute 9/ May 2016 refers).

Based upon the original scrutiny review today's contributors were given the following key lines of enquiry to develop the content of the briefing with an emphasis upon the support provided to the Flood and Water Management Team:

1. How does the County Council organise and manage the provision of IS and communication facilities to its frontline services?
2. How is the provision of those services funded, and what is the impact upon the frontline services?
3. What is the ability of individual Teams to take forward the delivery of their services using the internet and social media tools?
4. Bearing in mind the importance of partnership working across organisations, what are the challenges faced by the Council in terms of compatibility between IS systems and how can problems be overcome?
5. To what extent are the Council's own IS systems across the organisation integrated, and what is the programme for any necessary improvements?
6. How is the future development of IS and communications being taken forward, and the implications for a frontline service?

Analysis

A briefing paper is attached at Appendix B.

Councillor Stephen Canning, Cabinet Member for Digital Innovation, IT and Customer Services, will be attending the meeting together with Andrew Webb, IS

Technical Business Relationship Manager, and Kathryn Dedman, SUDS Approval Body Manager.

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Action required by the Committee at this meeting:

To consider the information provided through the briefing in response to recommendation 5 set out in this report. If there are any particular issues where further investigation may be considered necessary then a recommendation should be referred to the appropriate scrutiny committee with reasons for that referral.

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Appendix A

Extract from the Third Party Responsibilities and Flood Enforcement in Essex Scrutiny Report dated November 2015

- **ECC Flood Management Website**

    In June 2015 with the endorsement of the Essex Flood Partnership Board, the Flood & Water Management Team launched an animated version of the Essex Flood Risk Strategy on all forms of media including the County Council's website hosted under the 'what we do' pages, about the LLFA's Strategy. The site includes a three minute video, and provides seamless referral to the correct body responsible for different flooding issues. Unfortunately on the day that the Group viewed the website not all the links were fully functional.

    It is available via the following link-   *Please note that this link can no longer be opened site has been updated since scrutiny report published,*

    There are proposals to develop online facilities via the website too so that advice can be sought easily, and processes around Section 23 consents and SuDS can be handled more efficiently.

    The Flood Team drew attention to the toolkit that has been published by Northamptonshire County Council and is considered to be very good being held up as best practice by other LLFAs. However, it is expensive to acquire the toolkit and ECC has no proposals to acquire it.

Overall the Group was mindful of the importance of good information technology and its effective application. On behalf of the Group Councillor Pond had sought the views of the Epping Forest District Council contributors given their proven experience in raising public awareness about flood alleviation. While that Council had conducted some successful campaigns using informative printed leaflets, their distribution had been limited to targeted areas and delivery to households. It was agreed that publication of information via the internet is now essential providing access for a much wider audience than in the past. Similarly Councillor Butland had sought the views of Braintree District Council to obtain some additional views on steps that those Councils had taken around communication.

While the importance of imparting information through good electronic means cannot be overstated, contributors reinforced Members' own sentiments that a variety of communication channels need to be used including the internet, social media, distribution of leaflets, and attending meetings and other forum to engage directly with the public. On a practical level information that is published should be easy to understand and navigate, with key information such as telephone contact numbers and related website links being clearly provided in prominent positions.

The Group's consideration of the action being taken to raise public awareness using electronic means was at a time when changes were in the process of being made. IT and social media are a key component in the ability of the LLFA to engage more closely with the community in order to fulfil the County Council's statutory duties

around flood management. This also co-incides with the Council's strategic actions on the indicator 'Preventable flooding incidents' in the commissioning strategy 'People in Essex experience a high quality and sustainable environment'.

At a late stage in the production of the scrutiny report, concerns arose about the IT support and facilities available to the Flood Team that will play a key role in the development of frontline commissioned services. Aside from the need to be able to deliver effective online services, the Group learned that some members of the public had drawn the Team's attention to difficulties encountered in accessing online services via the County Council's website.

The scrutiny investigation has highlighted flood management as a positive example of a new evolving service where joined up working across services and teams as well as with other external bodies, is producing positive benefits. It is an area of high profile activity that is growing in stature not only as a result of the LLFA's proactive approach to embedding a new service necessary to fulfil the County Council's statutory responsibilities, but in terms of the wider flood agenda such as SuDS and infrastructure.

The impact of current IT facilities upon the development of flood management in particular is perhaps an area where the Task and Finish Group should undertake a short supplementary investigation. While welcoming the progress that has been made by the Flood and Highways Enforcement Teams during the scrutiny review, councillors were mindful that effective online facilities are crucial to the roll out of flood prevention measures. In practice the scrutiny review has proven to be a useful vehicle providing third party challenge to the way flood enforcement is moving forward, and it could be construed as an oversight if the matter of corporate IT support in the delivery of flood management services is not addressed satisfactorily given its underlying importance for engaging with the public.

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Corporate Information Services and Communications Support

This briefing paper was commissioned as part of the actions arising from the Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee's Scrutiny Report on 'Third Party Responsibilities and Flood Enforcement in Essex' for its meeting on 23 February 2017

The paper has been prepared on behalf of Councillor Canning, Cabinet Member for Digital Innovation, IT and Customer Services, by the following officers:
- Lucy Shepherd, Lead Local Flood Authority Manager
- Andy Webb, IS Technical Business Relationship Manager
- Georgianna Young, Digital Delivery Manager, Customer Services
- Andy Allsopp, Head of Communications and Marketing
- Hilary Rodgers, Channels, Digital and Social Media Manager

Overview of the Flood and Water Management Team

Since becoming established as a 'Lead Local Flood Authority' in 2010 after the implementation of the Flood and Water Management Act, Essex County Council (ECC) has developed a team of thirteen specialists, delivering a range of statutory and chargeable services.

Essex is considered a nationally high flood risk area with a total of 108,000 properties at risk from sources including the sea, main rivers, and surface water or rainfall flooding. In recent years we have seen some severe downpours and many cases of properties flooding internally. This has increased the customer and political focus on our role in managing flooding, along with a higher level of expectation. The support the Flood and Water Management Team receives from Communications and Information Support services has the potential to help it educate its customers, promote self-service and manage demand. The Team is keen to create a more structured communications plan in line with the emerging digital strategy. It would also like to develop its software and skills, enabling it to operate as a competitive traded service, with marketing and communications support to promote this. Its main aims are to ensure that future development is sustainable, and communities and individuals are safer from the risk of flooding.

Updates on Recent Progress

Working with the Flood and Water Management team, the Digital Channels Programme team have designed and delivered a new website. The site is designed for accessibility and is mobile responsive. The work involved cutting the technical content down and rewriting in user friendly language. The site was content was structured around customer journeys, clear 'call to action' buttons have been added to the homepage for the most frequently requested information and services. New online applications have been created for grants and existing forms have been reviewed and improved.

Source : http://flood.essex.gov.uk/
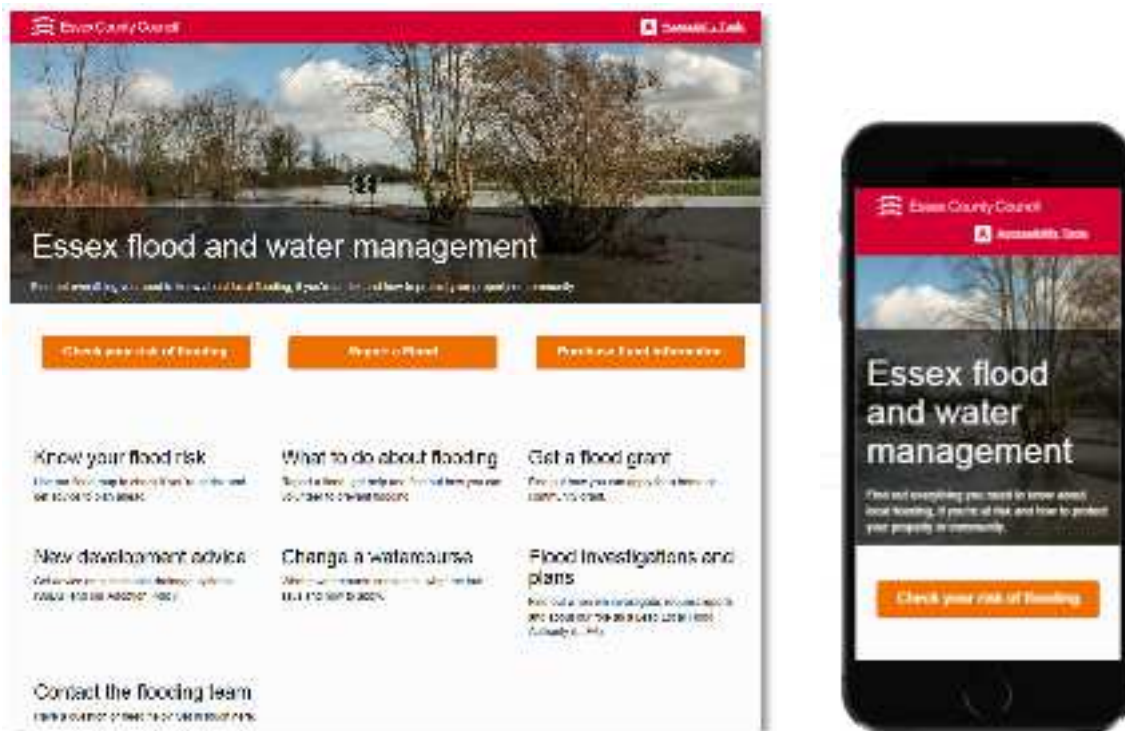
Following feedback from Councillor Brown, additional emergency information content has been added to the site. This provides residents with a one stop information page for advice, contact numbers and signposting to other services.
http://flood.essex.gov.uk/what-to-do-about-flooding/in-an-emergency/

Information Services recently recruited two business relationship managers to lead on strategic alignment and development across place-based and people-based Council services. They are engaged with the Flood Management team at this time working to develop the business case for new commercial services. The proposal includes sales and service management software to support the new business model, provided through the Council's Digital Foundations Programme which is itself moving through the governance process.

The Information Services projects team have also worked with the Flood Management team on initial trials of specialist flood modelling software. The team found some issues around compatibility and performance between the software and standard ECC laptops and have proposed an alternative and more flexible approach should the flood modelling software be procured.

Key Lines of Enquiry

1. How does the County Council organise and manage the provision of IS and communication facilities to its frontline services?

Under the current organisational structure, Information Services and the Digital Channels programme are both part of Customer and Technology Operations. Social media services and web content editing report thorough the Director for Strategy and Communications. The Digital Channels team design and create web sites and the

Communications team are responsible for ongoing management of content within sites.
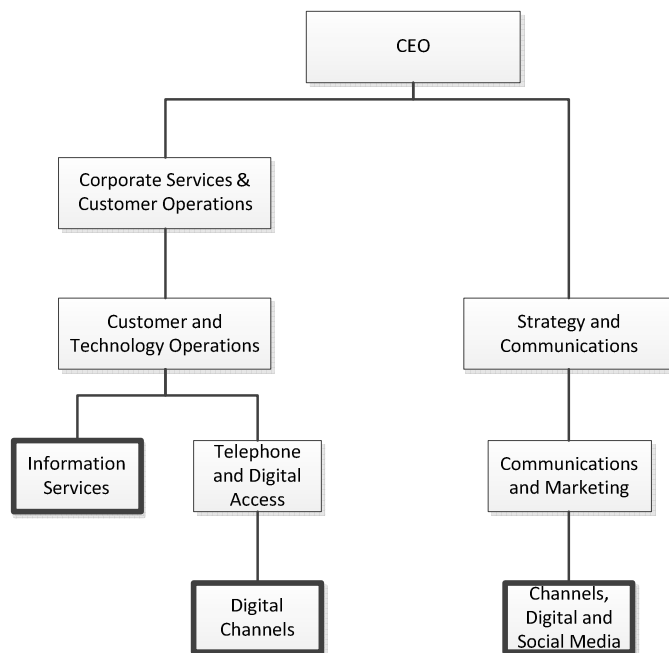
Current service structure, December 2016.

The Council operates a mixed sourcing model for the provision of Information Services. The core team provides a range of management, technical and development services. Further specific services are delivered by strategic partners. For example, a contract for Next Generation Network services was let to Daisy Update Communications Limited and includes data network services across our estate, telephony services and contact centre facilities.

Information Services are designed around recognised good practice including ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library i.e. a globally-recognized, comprehensive set of guidelines and best practices for IT services), and most services can be accessed through a self-service Online Portal. The wider IS leadership team also includes two business relationship managers who provide a strategic consultancy and engagement service across the organisation and with partners.

The Service Level Agreement for Information Services is available on the Intranet and through the link below
http://supportworks/sw/kb/documents/sla2015.pdf

The Digital Channels Programme is small multi skilled team. They focus on the customer, putting their energy into delivering tangible benefits that make a difference to the customer. The programme is making access to ECC simpler and more in line with customer expectations by moving more services to digital (channel shift) and implementing self-service wherever possible. This means that these interactions can take place at a time that fits with customer lifestyles; 24 hours a day 7 days a week, on a medium that the customer chooses. The team have adopted Agile working to develop innovative portals and solutions built around excellence in customer

experience; the first time this method has been used within ECC. By taking an iterative approach, it allows them to take into account new technological developments, changes to services, customer demand and expectations as well as the context in which we are operating. It importantly reduces the risk of a major investment upfront, by requesting a series of investment 'instalments' and allows the success of the programme to be demonstrated in smaller, more manageable phases of transformation.

Communications provides full service communications across all audiences as part of business-as-usual outputs and also in the event of an incident or emergency. A campaign to increase awareness of ECC's approach to flooding would require additional campaign budget.

2. <u>How are the provision of these services funded, and what is the impact upon the front line services?</u>

Information Services are fully funded through a mixed model. Staff time for standard (Business as Usual) services such as incidents and simple service requests are funded through a central base budget. Projects resources are recharged directly, in line with the approach set out in the Service Level Agreement.

The Digital Channels programme is funded centrally on a per-project basis through the Investment Board.

Front line services typically need to budget or bid for funding to provide resources for technology projects. IS Business Relationship Managers can now provide support in developing business cases and outline requirements for digital and technology services.

Communications support is predominantly funded through the Strategy and Communications corporate allocation but the team does generate its own income on much more limited basis from partners.

3. <u>What is the ability of individual Teams to take forward the delivery of their services using the internet and social media tools?</u>

A devolved approach to social media is applied across the organisation, with Corporate Communications providing advice, training and general support (along with the necessary policy and procedures) to ensure consistency of approach.
In the event of a major incident like a flood, corporate communications would lead on social media messaging, coordinated through established links with other blue light communications teams.

4. <u>Bearing in mind the importance of partnership working across organisations, what are the challenges faced by the Council in terms of compatibility between IS systems and how can problems be overcome?</u>

The prevailing model for Information Systems security and delivery amongst most organisations has long been insular, providing services for employees and protecting organisational borders from external access. This creates challenges in facilitating

requests to allow external suppliers and partners access to systems like our Intranet. The hurdles that must be overcome include compliance with data protection law, compliance with software licensing agreements and maintaining effective network and cyber security controls. As an example, Ringway Jacobs are a significant partner but do not currently have access to our Intranet data and services.

Flood services rely heavily on geographical (GIS) map data. The flood management team would benefit from greater access to GIS data held by district authorities and other partners. The scope, currency and format of data varies from authority to authority. GIS resource varies considerably from partner to partner. Some authorities have a dedicated GIS team whereas in others, GIS may be one of a number of responsibilities of a single post.

Authorities and partners have also made different investments in computing devices and software. For example, some of our commercial partners have invested heavily in supporting mobile computing devices and specialist flood modelling software. We do not currently have the technical infrastructure in place to support a wide range of mobile devices while maintaining security around our most sensitive sets of personal data such as social care records.

There are also challenges in supporting small installations of highly specialised software such as flood modelling applications. Due to the demands these place on computers and the network, they may require additional investment to ensure that employees can expect a reasonable experience when using the software.

A specific area of challenge is sharing large amounts of data with partners. The Flood Management team do not have access to a service that allows very large files to be shared with other organisations.

A number of work streams are in place to address these points and they are covered later in this report.

5. <u>To what extent are the Council's own IS systems across the organisation integrated, and what is the programme for any necessary improvements?</u>

The Council has standardised around widely used core technology from well-known suppliers including Microsoft and Dell. This continues to create opportunities to integrate systems across the authority.

The Flood Management team have highlighted GIS mapping data as an area where there is significant scope to join up information across the organisation. For example, each services area will typically maintain their own set of mapping data for local requirements and this can lead to duplication of information. Where data can be shared, it may not have been developed in a suitable format to meet other services' requirements.

6. <u>How is the future development of IS and communications being taken forward, and the implications for a frontline service?</u>

The Digital Foundations Programme led by Information Services is a roadmap for technology investment and delivery that will provide the computing devices and software to enable the authority's digital journey. This includes further work to join up information across the authority and greater flexibility in choice of laptop and mobile computing devices. The full business case has been submitted and is currently under consideration. Information Services have started to deploy Egress software initially to the IS Superuser community. This software can be trialled with the Flood Management team and is designed to move large files quickly and securely between organisations.

Information Services are configuring our Intranet and network to allow controlled access to Ringway Jacobs' highways employees. It is intended that this is extended to Mitie staff and then as a general model for partner access. This has included negotiation with our software suppliers to ensure that any additional license costs are minimised and services will be available by the end of Quarter one 2017.

Collaborating around GIS map data is a complex challenge. Information Services are currently completing a review of GIS services and data. This will include scope for further harmonisation of map data within the authority. Collaboration between partners might best be encouraged through agreeing standards amongst the GIS community, perhaps through the Essex Online Partnership GIS group.

Gavin Jones has presented a compelling vision for the future of the organisation and has described a well networked and highly collaborative culture. Programmes like Digital Foundations will provide the underpinning technology that will support a more joined-up approach to front line service delivery.

The essex.gov.uk and flood.essex.gov.uk websites will have the functionality to display IMPORTANT announcements messages. The flooding team will have training and access to add and update these messages out of hours.

A flowchart showing ECC communications in an emergency is shown overleaf.

Members flowchart
Essex County Council communications in an emergency

Are you a Cabinet Member?

Yes → **Does this emergency primarily affect an area within your portfolio?**

No → **Is this emergency specific to your constituency?**

Does this emergency primarily affect an area within your portfolio?
- **Yes** → If Essex County Council is the lead agency you may be required as a spokesperson

  Contact the communications team via your land officer who will brief you on the status and if or when you are required

  In the meantime
- **No** → Check your inbox for cabinet/member briefings

Is this emergency specific to your constituency?
- **No** → Check your inbox for member briefings
- **Yes** → We appreciate that you will be concerned for your constituents and will be looking to reassure

  Please contact the Essex County Council press desk who will put you in touch with the communications lead

  Email: press.desk@essex.gov.uk
  Tel: 03330 132800

  In the meantime

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