

Committee: Community and Housing

Agenda Item

Date: 17 March 2010

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Title: CESSATION OF SANDBAGS

**Author: Lisa Lipscombe Emergency Planning
Officer 01799 510624**

Item for information

Summary

1. This report, prepared at the request of Members, gives an update into the progress of the project to cease the supply of sandbags pursuant to the Committee's resolution on 12 November 2009.

Recommendations

2. That Members note this report.

Background Papers

3. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.
 - a. Emergency Planning Incident Logs 2003 - 2009

Impact

- 4.

Communication/Consultation	Consultation has been carried out with all Parish Councils and both North and South area Community Forums and Essex Fire & Rescue Service
Community Safety	No Impact
Equalities	There are key issues that have been recognised and due consideration has been given for educating and informing both Parish Councils and community
Finance	No cost for the recommendation, however if implemented, this will save the council an approximate figure of £6000 per annum based on current costing.
Health and Safety	No necessity for staff to be exposed to potential harm by being sent to flooded areas within the hours of darkness or without specific training or personal

	protection.
Human Rights/Legal Implications	None. There is no legal duty on the council to supply sandbags
Sustainability	None
Ward-specific impacts	All
Workforce/Workplace	Positive impact in terms of no longer requiring resources to be redirected.

Situation

5. In June 2009 an opening letter was sent to all parish clerks asking them to bring up at their next meeting the consultation of the cessation of sandbags asking for feedback and comments from councillors.
6. Several replies were received with only two that had concerns regarding the responsibility of supplying sandbags and some comments were made around the expectations of residents towards the district council.
7. Other replies were positive stating that the parishes agreed with the council not supplying sandbags as they understood the difficulties in delivery, efficiency and costs and also agreed that if sandbags were to be continued they would be better deployed from within the parish as this would be a much faster and altogether more efficient deployment. Some also agreed and commented on householders being helped to understand that they were responsible for their own property and asked that information be given to help them decide on which products or services were available.
8. A further letter following the decision from committee was sent, asking parishes to come forward and request sandbags from our depleting supplies to help them initially whilst they started to make their own provision of whatever product they chose If indeed they chose to do so.
9. All parish councils were invited to request and to date the following parishes have requested and received a small supply of sandbags to specified addresses within their locations: Thaxted, Newport, Clavering, Debden, Wendons Ambo and Great Chesterford. This activity has encouraged parishes to converse with their residents, some of who have come forward offering storage facilities that were not available in the past, making these areas much more resilient and the community as a whole have been highlighting their own risks and those of vulnerable people by identifying deployment methods that best suit their needs.
10. Only two councils have come forward specifically asking for information and education for their residents. Confirmation is awaited from partner agencies and outside organisations for sponsorship and shared best practice for these educational and informative events.

11. All parish councils have been given information how to sign up to the Met Office weather warnings and the Environment Agency Flood warnings, all methods have been explained and to date, positive feedback have been given from several councils who now have specific people within their community who can act upon these warnings if necessary.
12. There is to be a small event at Ashdon Village Hall in the very near future giving residents there, who are receiving DEFRA funding for flood defences, an opportunity to look at various types of products that they can choose from. For those parishes who have expressed an interest in a similar event, this will be organised outside of Ashdon and they will be specifically invited to attend an event to be held in the very near future at a local venue.
13. An email has been send to all parish councils asking for details of all properties that are worse affected also suggesting they consider the vulnerabilities of those properties. The Emergency Planning Officer has informed all parishes of the responsibilities of the emergency planning department of the district council during a major flood. This responsibility being to help and assist any residents that have to be evacuated in a severe incident and supplying them a safe refuge in the form of an emergency reception centre. All parish councils who are prone to flooding have their own emergency plans.
14. A letter will be sent to all households highlighted by the parish council as being at risk. The letter will again remind residents of the council's decision to cease sandbags and will include a directory of services and products available for flood defence as well as information of what to do in an emergency and information on how to sign up to the flood warning and severe weather warnings.
15. Parish Councillors were invited to come along to see a demonstration of Flood Sax that was held at the London Road Offices so that they could see for themselves an alternative to sandbags, that were easier to store and use by all, including those who are vulnerable in some way, as they are light and easy to put into place. Unfortunately only two councils responded and attended, however these councils were extremely interested ad have followed up with the company independently. The emergency planning department will continue to bring to the attention of any interested party, the various products available so they can then make informed choices for their own parishes.
16. As part of the ongoing general training of parish council emergency planning volunteers, we will again be holding a training event in the spring, this will be in the form or a table top exercise based around a flooding scenario and will bring to the fore any issues that have not yet been identified or dealt with.

Risk Analysis

17. There are no risks associated with this report.