

Corporate Scrutiny Committee – Tuesday, 7 November 2023**Written question from Cllr Michael Lilley to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee:**

In light of the recent flooding in Ryde and across the Island, there appears to be evidence of poor communication between the agencies particularly Environment Agency, Southern Water, Island Roads, IW Council, Parish and Town Councils, Emergency Services, and other stakeholders. This has left residents, families, businesses, and other organisations who have been directly flooded feeling not listened too, abandoned, angry, and in their eyes, unsupported.

1. Who is responsible overall for such a crisis on the Isle of Wight and what is the Council doing about improving communication, particular in the short-term and how are they communicating to the public, especially those who do not have benefit of internet? (note most flooded households lost their internet). Not a huge amount of internet/online information was sent out, often after the event. If you didn't pick it on-line, you would not have known.
2. What is the current emergency plan agencies were following, and can this plan be made available? Was it followed?
3. Post-Covid-19 all Parish and Town Council alongside IW Council had Resilience and Crisis/Emergency Plans in place. There is one in Ryde Town Council. Why hasn't IW Council fully recognised these plans alongside their emergency plans and why was there an observed lack of a lead coordinating body bringing all the agencies together in a joined up and coordinated way?
4. What is IW Council doing to get help out to people in need of support due to the flooding now, when it matters?

Response

I appreciate that everyone affected in the homes and businesses will have questions and their communities will want to tell their stories. However, the council will need to investigate, gather evidence, and prepare a full honest and open report which I will commit to bring to scrutiny at the earliest opportunity. The council as the local Flood Risk Authority will be preparing an investigation and flood report regarding all communities impacted and will be engaging with all affected residents and key stakeholders.

1. The Isle of Wight Council Response

The Isle of Wight Council led the response on the Island.

During the response Information Hubs were stood up in the most affected areas to provide direct communication and in-person support to affected residents, including:

- *Ryde (25 and 26 October with housing team support)*
- *Newport,*
- *East Cowes,*
- *Sandown,*

- *Yarmouth and*
- *Brading*

Printed information and guidance was made available in the hubs and well as staff to talk to.

On the 25 October and subsequent days, councillors were working in their communities, engaging with residents and passing on information issued by the council to the community.

The council also set up a dedicated Floodline help and guidance number for residents affected by flooding - this was available overnight at the height of the worst weather.

Warnings and alerts issued by The Met Office and Environment Agency were shared regularly across the council's social media platforms. Between 24 October and 2 November, the council issued some 50 Facebook posts. This includes where we have shared our posts into community groups. The reach for these posts was more than 345,000 Facebook accounts.

The council's website was kept up to date with the latest information, including important safety advice and guidance on what to do before, during and after extreme weather. Pages were updated when information changed, sometimes two or three times per day.

As well as our pre-prepared pages about Flooding and Storms and Gales, we created extra pages on School closures and service updates, What to do if you flood water contains sewage, Storm damaged tree information, Updates on what to do with waste and recycling and Rights of Way closures.

The communications through the website were timely and made an impact, with a full homepage takeover. Any queries or requests for help from internal services or through the command structure were acted on quickly and content produced in support. In comparison to other councils, the council's website was very comprehensive and made it easy for residents to find information they needed.

An initial look at the statistics shows the authority had a 21.52 per cent uplift in page views over the past week. Communications with the websites team, communications team and other services were prompt, efficient and co-ordinated. Much of the council's comms focussed on sign-posting residents to trusted sources of information.

These links were also shared with councillors (IWC and town and parish councils) as well as local media for onward circulation and we are thankful for all their support. Further communications were issued via the council's residents' newsletter (more than 4,800 residents), a media briefing was organised for local press and daily councillor briefings were established ahead of Storm Ciaran.

In total, the council issued seven press releases and responded to numerous local, regional and national media enquiries and interview requests. The whole team worked all the hours that were needed to ensure proactive and reactive work was completed to the highest standard.

2. Emergency Management Arrangements

The Council's Emergency Management Team maintains plans for a variety of emergencies, one of those being the Council's Emergency Response and Recovery Plan (ERRP). Elements of this plan were used in the response to the adverse weather to establish flexible and scalable response structures based on information available at the time.

Protectively marked as OFFICIAL SENSITIVE, a redacted public facing version of the plan can be found on the Council's website, here – <https://www.iow.gov.uk/keep-the-island-safe/emergency-management/the-emergency-management-team/>. Complimenting the Council's ERRP, the relevant sections of the Council's Severe Weather Arrangements Document were used, this plan is protectively marked as OFFICIAL SENSITIVE.

From a multi-agency perspective:

The tactical and strategic aspect of the response was co-ordinated through the Hampshire & Isle Wight Local Resilience Forum's Emergency Response Arrangements. The relevant sections of the Hampshire & Isle Wight Local Resilience Forum's Multi-Agency Flood Plan and the Island's Multi-Agency Evacuation and Shelter Arrangements were used.

These plans are protectively marked as OFFICIAL SENSITIVE. Plans are protectively marked as OFFICIAL SENSITIVE, as they contain data or information which, if released to the public in general could:

- Impede the effectiveness and ability of the Council to respond in an emergency.*
- Undermine the proper management of the public sector and its operations during such emergencies.*

The Council's Emergency Management Team can provide a more detailed briefing on the content of those plans if required.

3. Town and Parish Emergency Plans

Not all Town and Parish Councils have Crisis/Emergency Plans, and we are aware that a plan exists for Ryde and Binstead. On the morning of 25 October, knowing that Ryde Town Council did have a plan, conversation to place between the Emergency Management Team and Ryde Town Council staff, to identify potential locations for the establishment of a site close to the affected area that could be used to provide immediate respite for residents and operate as an "information hub", staffed by Council Officers.

Although some sites identified in the Plan were discussed at this time, the Council's Resilience Manager determined that the option of using Ryde Castle provided an immediately available site, close to the incident.

As the day unfolded the "hub" relocated to Aspire (a location identified in the Ryde Town Council Plan), to provide more space and an area within which more sensitive discussions could be undertaken. This move also enabled closer working between the deployed Council Officers and the staff in Aspire.

The co-ordination of the multi-agency response at the tactical and strategic level was undertaken through the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Local Resilience Forum's Emergency Response Arrangements (see the answer to question 2).

On the Island, regular co-ordination meetings were undertaken between the Council, Island Roads, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire & Rescue Service, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary, the Maritime & Coastguard Agency and the Isle of Wight Ambulance Service.

These meetings provided the link into operational engagement undertaken by the Council with the Environment Agency, Southern Water and SSEN, Town and Parish Councils and enabled direct engagement with Councillors when required.

4. Flood Recovery

In line with the Council's ERRP, whilst the Council was still responding to the emergency a Recovery Lead was identified (Colin Rowland, Strategic Director, Community Services). A Recovery Team has been established and is implementing a recovery strategy.

Specifically in Ryde, the council has worked with ward members and the Town Council to:

- Expedite skip licencing for the affected area to less than 48 hours*
- Enable multiple tip trips per day for residents clearing their homes and volunteers clearing neighbouring family and friends' waste.*
- Temporarily rehoused those most in need.*
- Provided additional support to older and other vulnerable residents.*
- Communicated to residents affected the availability of discretionary hardship payments and council tax relief.*
- Provided information and advice through the Town Council and local councillors working with the community.*
- Provided thousands of additional sandbags and replenished stocks when requested.*
- Information and advice to affected businesses.*

We will continue to provide support and advice to those affected as we recognise that it will take some time for those affected to fully recover from the recent flood events and ensure that:

- Affected residents are enabled to return home or have plans with insurance companies to return to their homes. Support is provided for those people that are identified as living in uninsured properties.*
- Businesses & charities are operating as business as usual and fully functioning.*
- Public Infrastructure is fully recovered.*
- Residents are well informed and empowered to move on.*
- A flood report is produced which identifies costs and benefits of actions taken and recommendations for other actions that support more resilient communities.*