

## **Committee: Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

**Date: 2 September 2021**

### **Subject: Flooding update**

Lead officer: Director of Environment and Regeneration, Chris Lee

Lead member: Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency, Councillor Martin Whelton

Contact officer: Senior flood risk engineers, Tom Sly and Selisa Fergus Fleary

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#### **Recommendations:**

A. That Members note the contents of this report.

#### **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1. This report provides an overview and update on the recent flooding in the borough and explains our statutory duties, responsibilities and actions along with other Risk Management Authorities including Thames Water and the Environment Agency.

#### **2 DETAILS**

##### **Summary of recent flooding:**

- 2.1. Significant flooding occurred in Merton and in other parts of London throughout a number of dates in July 2021 due to heavy and high intensity thunderstorms resulting in flooding of roads and town centres and internal flooding of homes and businesses, mainly from surface water.
- 2.2. Met Office Weather Warnings and Flood Alerts were issued last month by the Environment Agency's Floodline service on 12th July, 20th July, 23rd July and 25th July 2021. The latter was escalated to a warning for the Beverley Brook at West Barnes and Motspur Park on the 26th July 2021.
- 2.3. Analysis shows that the 12th July 2021 was an extraordinary event with over a month's worth of rain falling in just one hour, in a significant part of west London.
- 2.4. Following the flood events in July 2021, the Leader of the Council wrote to Thames Water raising concerns about the flooding and particularly their assets and asking for their ongoing support for residents.
- 2.5. In a response letter to the Leader of the Council (Cllr Mark Allison) and the Chief Exec (Hannah Doody), on the 21st July, Thames Water stated that *'initial figures suggest that last week's storm was overall a 1 in 100-year event. However, due to the very localised nature of the rainfall, some areas saw a far more intense downpour, pushing that figure towards a 1 in 300-year event.'*

- 2.6. Within Merton we have had reports of up to 160 homes being flooded internally.
- 2.7. **Locations affected in Merton:**
- 2.8. The worst of the rainfall occurred in the west and south west of the borough.. Significant and internal flooding of properties occurred in Raynes Park, West Barnes, Lower Morden, Cannon Hill, Dundonald, Hillside and Wimbledon Park.
- 2.9. The sources of flooding experienced on these events were:
- sewer flooding on streets and within people’s homes from Thames Water’s sewer assets,
  - surface water flooding on the highway from heavy rain leading to the drains being full of water and not being able to drain away fast enough
  - river flooding from the Beverley Brook overtopping its banks.

**Who is responsible for managing flood risk in Merton?**

- 2.10. Section 7 of this report sets out the statutory framework and lists the responsibilities of the council, the utilities companies (in Merton, Thames Water and Sutton and East Surry Water), the Environment Agency and Transport for London.
- 2.11. In summary, and most relevant to the July 2021 rainfall, the responsibilities in Section 7 can be summarised as
- 2.11.1 Merton Council is responsible for ensuring that the gullies and drains in the road are kept clear so rainwater can drain away. As set out in Section 7 of this report, we also have responsibilities for emergency planning.
- 2.11.2 Thames Water are responsible for ensuring that the surface water sewers / pipes under the road that the council’s gullies run into are kept clear so water can drain away.
- 2.11.3 The Environment Agency are responsible for river flooding.

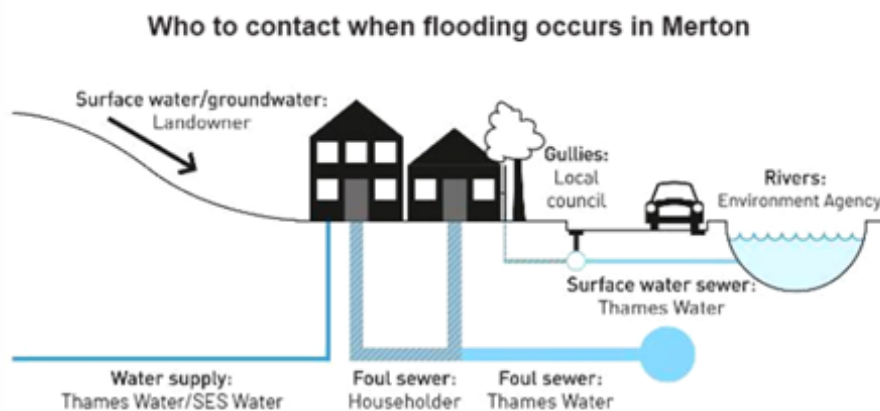


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**2.12. What has the council done?**

- 2.13. Parts of Merton, including Raynes Park town centre, have historic records of surface water flooding and the council has been working proactively to try and reduce flood risk from heavy rainfall.

#### **Increased gully cleaning and quality of data to predict future issues**

- 2.14. Merton's Gully cleaning service is managed by Publicspace and their term contractor Veolia. In addition to this, Highways term contractor FM Conway are used for High Risk Gully cleansing, highway drainage works and repairs to assets.
- 2.15. Merton's "high risk" gully cleaning focuses on about a third of the borough's 17,000 gullies each year. It takes a "smart cities" approach, using data gathered from the gullies. This includes
- Measuring the level of silt in the gully so we can understand how quickly particular roads or gullies are silting up and what might be causing problems in each area
  - Cleaning gullies ensuring they run free and fixing any damaged council gullies
  - Using GPS, updating the state of the gully online so we have real-time information as to what gullies are cleaned and the level of silt since the last cleanse
  - Using CCTV to ensure the gully and the associated Thames Water sewer is free draining
- 2.16. The council also runs an A-Z gully cleaning service across the whole borough which visits every gully across a three-year period. .

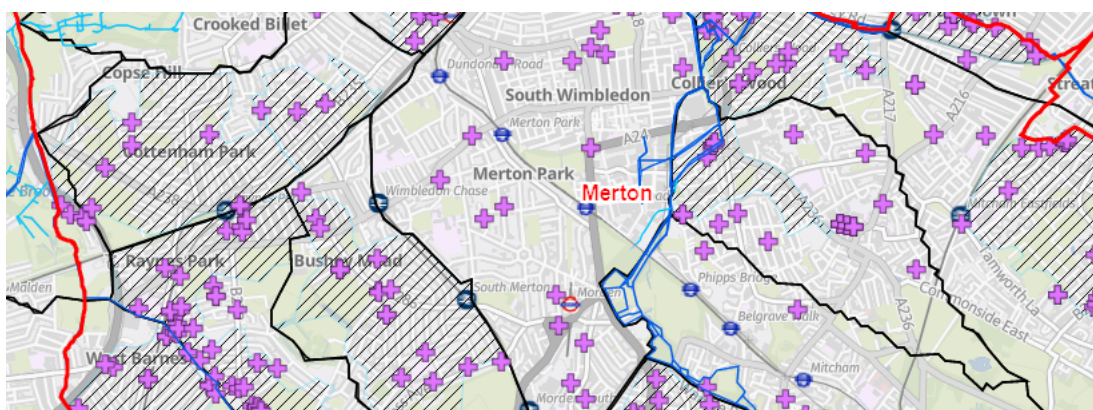
#### **Installed gully sensors**

- 2.17. We have also installed gully sensors across Merton, particularly in areas that are susceptible to surface water flooding such as Raynes Park and Wimbledon town centres. These sensors notify us in real time if the gully is blocked (for example, if someone pours building waste down it) so we target particular blockages and ensure that they are dealt with swiftly.

#### **Extensive CCTV of council highways and Thames Water surface water sewers and supporting Thames Water to repair their assets in Merton**

- 2.18. Council officers have been proactive in undertaking CCTVs not only of council pipework but also of Thames Water assets and reporting problems found to Thames Water. This work is often carried out with road closures and overnight to minimise disruption to residents.
- 2.19. In late 2020 the council undertook CCTV of council gullies and Thames Water surface water sewers in the Raynes Park area and found that the Thames Water sewers were partly blocked with silt.
- 2.20. Officers liaised with Thames Water and organised a night-time road closure in the Raynes Park area to allow Thames Water to come and remove 21 tonnes of silt from Thames Water's pipework in Raynes Park. Council officers have continued with this offer to arrange for night time road closures to enable Thames Water to clean or repair their assets.

- 2.21. Council officers also proactively participate in Thames Water’s drainage and asset management plans to try and ensure that Thames Water include records of historic surface water flooding at places like Raynes Park and other areas of Merton in deciding where to prioritise their repairs and resources.
- 2.22. Made it easier for all property owners and occupiers to find out if they are in or near an area of flood risk
- 2.23. As Lead Local Flood Authority, it is the council’s duty to consider flood risk from all sources, not only from rivers but surface water flooding from heavy rain and groundwater flooding. The council has prepared a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment with neighbouring boroughs of Wandsworth, Sutton and Croydon for flooding from all sources in south London
- 2.24. However many people focus on fluvial flood risk and don’t fully consider that other parts of south London, far away from rivers and streams, are also at risk of flooding. Therefore we have prepared Merton’s Strategic Flood Risk Assessment as a GIS Storymap, to make it as easy as possible for residents, businesses, utilities companies and others to find out what parts of Merton are at risk from flooding. It also includes some historic records of flood incidences and the British Geological Survey’s data on the underlying bedrock in Merton.
- 2.25. [Merton’s Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Storymap](#) is available on the council’s website. Below is an extract of areas at risk of surface water flooding in Merton together with historic flood incidences reported to the council.



- 2.26. Merton’s adopted and emerging planning policies require all development to consider and manage flood risk from all sources. The council has also provided specific planning guidance on Sustainable Drainage Systems and basement and subterranean developments to help development proposals manage flood risk.

**Thames Water**

- 2.27. As set out above, council officers have been working closely with Thames Water for a long time towards getting additional investment into TW assets in Merton and to solving problems identified in previous flood events.
- 2.28. Merton’s senior flood risk management engineer participated in all Thames Water’s workshops on their Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan to

try and ensure the conditions we are experiencing in Merton are reflected in TW's asset management plans for the future.

2.29. As well as the asset management above, council officers and Thames Water attended Raynes Park community forum in September 2019 to answer residents' questions on flood risk and ensure that everybody is aware to contact both Thames Water and the council to get help with flooding. Officers and Thames

2.30. In July 2021 the Leader of the Council wrote to Thames Water (see appendix A) raising concerns about the flooding and particularly their assets and asking for their ongoing support for residents.

2.31. Council officers are continuing to hold regular meetings with the head of operations of Thames Water, their asset managers and systems planners to ensure actions are being implemented by TW. These will continue indefinitely to ensure that blockages and problems with Thames Water assets do not continue to cause problems for Merton residents.

2.32. As a result, Thames Water have agreed to

- undertake CCTV surface water sewers that council officers have alerted them to, to repair their assets and remove silt, particularly around Raynes Park, West Barnes Lane, Wimbledon town centre, Garth Road and Wimbledon Park.
- seek internal approval to embark on hydraulic modelling within Raynes Park and other areas.
- Investigate why surface water is overloading their foul water network and causing sewage flooding on streets and in people's homes. In the Raynes Park catchment, Thames Water have a separate surface water (rainwater) and foul water (sewage) system, however in heavy rainfall rainwater is getting into Thames Water's foul water system somewhere, causing sewage overflows into people's properties and Thames Water do not know where this is happening.

2.33. As required by [Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010](#) , the council will be undertaking investigations into the specific causes of flooding of people's properties where five or more properties were flooded in an area.

### **Reporting flooding**

2.34. It is extremely important that property owners and occupiers contact both the council **and** Thames Water when they experience flooding within their properties following heavy rainfall.

2.35. During periods of heavy rainfall, residents and businesses all over London are reporting flooding on roads and sometimes within properties. Thames Water will prioritise their resources on the basis of the number of calls. Images in the media, calls from councillors and council officers to Thames Water on behalf of property owners do not count towards prioritising Thames Water resources.

2.36. Following the 12<sup>th</sup> July 2021 flood events in Raynes Park and despite the extensive photo and video coverage on Sky News, BBC News and other

online media and phone calls from council officers, on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2021 Thames Water told council officers that they had no records of flooding on roads such as Abbots Avenue aside from calls from council officers. Thames Water explained that they had records of +100 calls from other areas in west London at the same time so prioritised the immediate action to those locations.

- 2.37. Thames Water's long-term investment plans are based on the number of reported incidents of flooding, so by not reporting flooding to Thames Water not only are residents not able to get immediate help, Thames water do not prioritise Merton for future investment.
- 2.38. Despite the messages on the council's website and both Thames Water and council officers attending Raynes Park Community Forum to promote the need to contact both parties, residents are still calling the council on all flood matters, including sewage. This may be because:
- The council is far easier to get hold of – during the July 2021 flood events council officers spent 2 hours per call trying to get through to Thames Water's flood line.
  - Thames Water's website states "*problems with flooded roads should be reported to your local council*" and does not explain that it should also be reported to Thames Water if there is any doubt about what might be causing the flooding such as blocked Thames Water sewers preventing the water from draining away.
  - Thames Water call centre options divert callers to call their Local Authority
  - Thames Water's website requires callers with sewer flooding within or outside their homes to download a PDF, complete it and post it to Thames Water to report sewer flooding. This is not practical while someone's property is flooded with sewage.
- 2.39. Council officers have raised these issues with Thames Water and asked Thames Water to amend their website and the advice being given from TW's call centre. Council officers have also asked Thames Water to make it easier for residents to report flooding, particularly sewage flooding and have asked Thames Water to distribute paper copies of their online guidance "[what to do if sewer flooding affects your home](#)" and the [Thames Water foul water flooding report](#) to affected parts of Merton.
- 2.40. Thames Water will help clean up sewage flooding inside and outside people's properties and bill payers are able to claim money back from their Thames Water bill (see the guide on the [Thames Water website](#)) but Merton residents may not be receiving this help unless they have contacted Thames Water directly to report their sewage flooding – reports from council officers and councillors do not count towards this..

### **Next steps**

- 2.41. The changing climate is leading to an increase in extreme weather globally and we are seeing an increase in heavy downpours and associated flash flooding in the summer months in London and the south east. The topography of south London means that some parts of Merton that are not



near rivers remain susceptible to flash flooding from heavy rain (e.g. Raynes Park, as it lies at the bottom of a hill). It will not be possible to entirely prevent future flood events.

2.42. Merton Council will

- Continue to encourage Thames Water to make it easier for residents and other property owners to contact them and get help, both during a flood event and afterwards.
- Ensure council gullies and assets are well maintained and clean; continuing the “smart cities” approach to get real-time data from increasing gulley sensors.
- Continue to work closely with Thames Water to ensure their assets are unblocked and repaired.
- Undertake Section 19 investigations where 5 or more properties have flooded.
- Review Merton’s gulley cleaning performance to ensure that both the high risk programme and the A-Z programme are performing at the optimum level.
- Ensure that flood risk management services feed into the council’s current review of its emergency planning.

### **3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

3.1. None for the purposes of this report

### **4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

4.1. The council’s website has been updated to give residents as much clarity as possible on who to contact in the event of a flood

4.2. As stated on the council’s website and at community events such as the Raynes Park forum by both Thames Water and the council, it is very important that residents and businesses contact Thames Water directly in the event of a flood in their homes, particularly if sewage is present. This is because:

4.2.1 Thames Water will help clean foul water and sewage up from people’s properties and streets if they receive a direct report from a resident

4.2.2 Thames Water will prioritise their resources to help the parts of London where they receive the most calls

4.2.3 Thames Water bill payers may be able to claim up to half their wastewater bill back from Thames Water but only if they contact Thames Water themselves

4.3. While Thames Water acknowledges calls from council officers and councillors, these calls do not count towards getting the residents this help.

4.4. [Thames Water’s website](#) provides more details including:

- [What to do if sewer flooding affects your home?](#)
- [Thames Water - report sewer flooding](#)

## **5 TIMETABLE**

5.1. None for the purposes of this report.

## **6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

6.1. The level of financial impact will be updated when required work is identified and assessed.

## **7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

7.1. As a Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA), Merton Council's, responsibilities relate to 'local' flood risk from surface water, groundwater and small rivers, streams and ditches, known as ordinary watercourses.

7.2. Merton is a Lead Local Flood Authority as defined in section 6(7) of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 and as such in the event of becoming aware of a flood in its area has a duty under section 19 of that Act, to the extent that it considers it necessary or appropriate, to investigate:

(a) which risk management authorities have relevant flood risk management functions, and

(b) whether each of those risk management authorities has exercised, or is proposing to exercise, those functions in response to the flood.

7.3. 7.3 Where the Council carries out such an investigation it must publish the results of its investigation, and notify any relevant risk management authorities.

7.4. The following organisations are designated Risk Management Authorities and the Floods and Water Management Act 2010 have a number of legal responsibilities for managing flood risk in the London Borough of Merton:

- Merton Council as the Lead Local Flood Authority and Highways Authority,
- Environment Agency,
- Thames Water Utilities as the Sewerage Undertaker, and
- Transport for London as the Highways Authority.

7.5. All Risk Management Authorities have a duty to cooperate with the LLFA, and other Risk Management Authorities when exercising their flood risk management functions.

7.6. Merton Council is responsible for:

- The drainage of surface water from the Strategic Road Network (SRN) and Local Distributor Roads, including Local Access roads (such as the A298, A236 and residential streets excluding private roads).



- Maintaining the road drains on minor roads, including kerbs, road gullies, ditches and the pipe network which connects to the Thames Water sewers.
  - Developing and implementing an emergency plan, contingency plan and business continuity plan.
  - Ensuring flood risk is considered in the Local Plan.
  - Making decisions on planning applications which may be at risk of flooding or increase flooding elsewhere.
  - Agreeing any works to ordinary watercourses (i.e. streams, ditches) which may affect the flow or storage of water.
  - Maintaining Council owned assets, such as drainage ditches, gullies, trash screens/grills.
- 7.7. Merton Council as the Highways Authority:
- 7.8. The highway drainage system is integral in the management and behaviour of surface water during heavy rainfall events. As a Highways Authority, the Highways Act 1980 requires that Merton Council ensure that highways are drained of surface water and where necessary maintain the highway drainage system, up to the point of connection with the sewer network.
- 7.9. Merton Council is a Category 1 Responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and therefore has a responsibility, along with other organisations, for developing emergency plans, contingency plans and business continuity plans to help reduce, control or ease the effects of an emergency. The complex and diverse nature of flooding and the consequences that arise require a comprehensive and often sustained response from a wide range of organisations, and as such Merton Council has prepared a multi-agency flood plan<sup>18</sup> to allow all responding parties to work together on an agreed coordinated response to severe flooding.
- 7.10. The Environment Agency is responsible for:
- Managing flooding from main rivers (e.g. River Thames, the Beverley Brook, the Pyl Brook and River Wandle), reservoirs, estuaries and the sea.
  - Providing a strategic overview for all sources of flooding and coastal erosion.
  - Regulation of third party works on main rivers.
- 7.11. Thames Water are responsible for:
- The drainage of surface water from development via sewers adopted by Thames Water.
- Maintaining public sewers owned by Thames Water into which the vast majority of the highway drainage connects.
  - Maintaining and improving its water mains and other pipes to reduce the risk of leaking or burst pipes.

- Reporting its performance each year to Ofwat (The Water Services Regulation Authority), including in respect of internal sewer flooding of properties.

7.12. Transport for London are responsible for:

The drainage of surface water from TfL adopted roads and red routes (major Strategic Routes including A24, A217 and A3).

Maintaining the drains on TfL adopted roads and red routes, including kerbs, road gullies, ditches and the pipe network which connects to the Thames Water sewers.

## **8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

8.1. None for the purposes of this report.

## **9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

9.1. None for the purposes of this report.

## **10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

10.1. As set out in the body of this report.

## **11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**

- Appendix A – Letter from the Leader of Merton Council to Thames Water 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021

## **12 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

12.1. [Merton's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment including online Storymap](#)

12.2. [Merton's Local Plan including flood risk policies](#)

12.3. [Merton's Sustainable Drainage Systems supplementary planning document](#)

12.4. [Merton's basement and subterranean development supplementary planning document.](#)

12.5. [Thames Water - What to do if sewer flooding affects your home?](#)

12.6. [Thames Water - report sewer flooding questionnaire](#)