



MINUTES

CITY OF WESTMINSTER

Finance, Smart City and City Management Policy and Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Minutes of a meeting of the **Finance, Smart City and City Management Policy and Scrutiny Committee** held in person in Porchester Hall (address) Porchester Hall, Porchester Road, W2 5HS, on 30 September 2021 at 6.30pm and livestreamed **via Microsoft Teams**.

Members Present: Councillors Gotz Mohindra (Chairman), Ian Adams, Geoff Barraclough, Nafsika Butler-Thalassis, Lorraine Dean, Guthrie McKie, Robert Rigby, and Emily Payne.

Also present: Councillor James Spencer (Cabinet Member for City Management), Lewis Aaltonen (Policy and Scrutiny Co-Ordinator), Councillor Ruth Bush, Jason Emmett (Police Constable, Metropolitan Police Service), Darsha Gill (Operations Manager, Environment Agency), Councillor Matthew Green, Artemis Kassi (Lead Scrutiny Officer / Statutory Scrutiny Officer), Sam Lumb (Deputy Director of Corporate Affairs, Environment Agency), George Mayhew (Corporate Affairs Director, Thames Water), Raj Mistry (Executive Director of Environment & City Management), Matthew Rimmer (Head of Customer Field Services, Thames Water), Philip Robson (Head of Operations for City Highways, Environment & City Management), Jon Singleton (London Fire Brigade) and Commander Rodney Vitalis (London Fire Brigade).

1. MEMBERSHIP

1.1. Councillor Geoff Barraclough replaced Councillor Paul Dimoldenberg, Councillor Nafsika Butler-Thalassis replaced Councillor Adam Hug, Councillor Guthrie McKie replaced Councillor Pancho Lewis, and Councillor Robert Rigby replaced Councillor Eoghain Murphy for this meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1. There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES

3.1. **RESOVLED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2021 would be reviewed at the Committee's next meeting, scheduled for 19 October 2021.

4. WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL INTERIM REPORT

4.1. Before inviting Westminster City Council to present its interim report, the Chairman, Cllr Gotz Mohindra, had explained that this was an extraordinary scrutiny meeting and outlined the format for the meeting. The Chairman had also explained that, in a scrutiny meeting, questions would not be taken from the Public Gallery during the meeting but that one ward councillor from each of the affected wards had been invited to make a short deputation during the meeting, in addition to written deputations in advance of the meeting. Cllr Mohindra also explained that the purpose of scrutiny was to ensure transparency, accountability, better decision-making, improved services for residents and learning. Cllr Mohindra also referred to figures published by the London mayor's office showing that 200,000 homes and workplaces, as well as 25% of rail stations in the capital and 10% of the network, a fifth of London schools, were all at high risk of flooding if extreme temperatures and flooding deteriorated and observed that there were lessons to be taken from the flooding events in Westminster in July.

4.2. The Chairman also outlined the format for the meeting, stating that the Committee would receive presentations on the response to the July flooding incidents from Westminster City Council officers, Thames Water officers and the London Fire Brigade. The Chairman explained that all questions would be asked following the presentations by Westminster City Council officers, Thames Water and the London Fire Brigade.

4.3. The Committee welcomed Councillor Geoff Barraclough to speak on behalf of the residents of Maida Vale Ward. The Committee noted Cllr Barraclough's deputation, which focused on the trauma, loss of property, and peril that residents had experienced. Cllr Barraclough suggested lines of enquiry for the meeting, including: the slow response of relevant authorities, including Thames Water, Westminster City Council, and housing associations, primarily Notthing Hill Genesis; the lack of meaningful support offered to victims; the failure of the Maida Vale Flood Alleviation Scheme; and floodproofing of residents' homes.

4.4. The Committee welcomed Councillor Ruth Bush, who spoke on behalf of the residents of Harrow Road Ward. The Committee heard Councillor Bush's experience on the evening of the floods and was also informed that Harrow Road Ward was not as badly affected as Maida Vale Ward. Cllr Bush highlighted that this could have been due to the reservoir under Tamplin Mews Gardens, which was built by Thames Water specifically to contain the risk of sewer flooding. The Committee noted that the Leader of the Council, Rachael Robathan, had not visited the areas affected until Saturday, 17 July, and it was not known whether Thames Water personnel had done so at all.

4.5. The Committee welcomed Councillor Matthew Green, who spoke on behalf of the residents of Little Venice Ward. The Committee was informed of the devastation that the Councillors of Little Venice Ward had witnessed first-hand, and the anguish of residents, some of whom had been flooded for the third time on 12 July. The Committee was called upon to seek out answers to questions including: Why was it that Thames Water's Maida Vale Flood Alleviation Scheme, installed in 2015 at the cost of £16m, failed? The Scheme had been advertised as preventing flooding for the next century, but had not prevented the flooding on July 12; Why could residents not get in touch with Thames Water on the night of July 12, and why were the Councillors of Little Venice Ward still receiving reports that residents could not get in touch with Thames Water; Whether or not Thames Water representatives were present on the night of July 12, and the following day; Why was it that Thames Water seemed to have underestimated the amount of affected properties and the scale of damages; and why did the Interim Report from Thames Water claim that it could be estimated that damages resulting from the floods were in excess of £1m?

The Committee heard Cllr Green's list of demands on behalf of the residents of Little Venice Ward that Thames Water: take urgent action to provide greater capacity in their sewer systems; act before another severe weather event happened, which could be at any time; and investigate the properties affected on 12 July and pay for the provision and installation of Non-Return Valves, which may have helped to prevent flooding.

The Committee welcomed Councillor Adam Hug, who spoke on behalf of the residents of Westbourne Ward. The Committee was advised that Westminster City Council's response had been slow, and that a review of the Council's internal communications should be undertaken. Cllr Hug highlighted that a street presence from the Council had not been evident on July 12 until very late at night, and Porchester Hall had not been confirmed as a respite centre for affected residents until late in the night, leaving residents unsure where they could go for aid. The Committee was informed that Westbourne Grove Councillors were disappointed with the lack of information provided in Thames Water's report, particularly its failure to address the Flood Alleviation Schemes and clarify why they had not stopped the flooding. The Committee noted that many residents had reported a sudden and dramatic draining away of water within a matter of minutes, with some believing that this was due to the lifting of manhole covers in affected areas. The Committee was notified that it was the view of Westbourne Councillors that Thames Water, as a profitable enterprise, should provide compensation to the victims of the floods on July 12.

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- 4.7. The Committee welcomed Councillor Emily Payne, who spoke on behalf of the residents of Bayswater Ward. The Committee was informed that in Bayswater homeowners had been forced to evacuate, and landlords had lost tenants, causing huge financial implications. Cllr Payne also highlighted any shops and businesses in Bayswater had been decimated, and the Committee appreciated that these events were crippling in the context of the recent re-opening of the City's high streets. The Committee was made aware that Housing Associations had been failing to adequately maintain properties in the affected areas, contributing to the severity of home flooding. The Committee noted that immense work had been undertaken to construct a pumped storage shaft on the Hallfield Road Estate and queried whether this storage shaft was fully operational on July 12.
- 4.8. The Committee welcomed Councillor Robert Rigby, who spoke on behalf of the residents of Regent's Park Ward. The Committee was notified that several mansion blocks in Regent's Park Ward had been badly affected, with some residents forced to vacate their properties as they were flooded with contaminated water, because local drainage infrastructure was unable to cope with the level of rainfall on July 12. The Committee noted the concern that this would not be a one-off occurrence, and stated it was imperative that the relevant authorities act quickly to protect Westminster residents from future flooding.
- 4.9. The Committee noted written submissions from Councillors Susie Burbridge on behalf of Lancaster Gate ward, Selina Short, representing Vincent Square Ward, Christabel Flight on behalf of Warwick Ward, Tim Mitchell on behalf of St. James' Ward, and Elizabeth Hitchcock on behalf of Knightsbridge and Belgravia Ward. It was noted that Tony Devenish, also a Councillor representing Knightsbridge and Belgravia Ward, had chaired a meeting regarding the flooding events of July at the Greater London Authority (GLA).
- 4.10. The Committee welcomed Councillor James Spencer, Cabinet Member for City Management to introduce the Interim Report from Westminster City Council. The Committee was assured that flooding was a huge concern for Westminster City Council, that residents' concerns had been heard and that with the onset of climate

change, the Council was keenly aware that flooding events such as the July incidents were likely to become increasingly common. Cllr Spencer stated that, in the context of climate change, it was no longer possible to hide behind the argument that flooding events such as these would occur once in 30 years. Cllr Spencer acknowledged that the response of Westminster City Council could have been better, but highlighted the vital role of City Inspectors in keeping the City safe as well as the work of Westminster Connects.

4.11. The Committee welcomed Phil Robson (Head of Operations for City Highways, Environment & City Management) to introduce the Interim Report. The Committee was made aware that a survey designed to gather information about affected residents was being kept open until December 17 2021, in order to gain as many reports as possible. The Committee was provided with information on the details of the flooding events in July and how 'super-cell rainfall' in extreme volume had overwhelmed the sewer system. The Committee also heard that, whilst Westminster gullies were cleared regularly, there would be a review of the frequency of gully clearings, to ensure that blockages in gullies would not contribute to pressure on drainage systems.

5. THAMES WATER INTERIM BRIEFING REPORT

5.1. The Committee welcomed Matthew Rimmer and George Mayhew to introduce the Interim Briefing Report from Thames Water.

5.2. The Committee was informed that Thames Water's Interim Briefing Report, and the evidence they would provide at this meeting applied to the events of both July 12 and July 25.

5.3. The Committee heard that heavy rainfall had overwhelmed Thames Water's drainage systems, including the Maida Vale Flood Alleviation Scheme. The Committee was advised that Thames Water considered their response on the nights of the floods to be unacceptable and that residents having to wait hours to contact Thames Water, and the time taken for Thames Water officers to arrive on scene was as also considered unacceptable. The Committee further heard that the storm itself had not been predicted, despite Thames Water's close monitoring of the weather. The Committee was informed that Thames Water would introduce a new telephony system and work rota, to improve on response rate.

5.4. The Committee accepted that, whilst this did not excuse the events of the night, nor absolve any party present, the predominant cause of the floods had been the intensity and volume of rainfall in a short space of time.

6. LONDON FIRE BRIGADE BRIEFING REPORT

- 6.1. The Committee welcomed Borough Commander Rodney Vitalis and Station Commander Jon Singleton of the London Fire Brigade (LFB) to introduce the London Fire Brigade Briefing Report.
- 6.2. The Committee heard that on July 12 2021, the London Fire Brigade Control had experienced the busiest call rate in its recorded history. Commander Vitalis advised the Committee that at approximately 7:30PM, the LFB had declared a major incident due to heavy rainfall causing a series of flooding events across northwest and southwest London and that by midnight, the call rate had escalated to 1755 calls, whereas on a normal night at this time, calls would have averaged 115. The Committee was presented with some examples of calls which the LFB received, including people trapped inside vehicles by high water; flooding in residential premises; evacuating or rescuing people trapped inside their homes; flooding incidents where there was a risk of fire; partial collapse of structures due to water pressure; and flooding of other premises, such as transport hubs and electrical substations.
- 6.3. The Committee was informed of the LFB's method of responding to these incidents via the process of 'batch mobilising,' whereby officers would be dispatched in groups to a hub in a local area with multiple appliances (fire engines) in order to rapidly deploy in that area. The Committee heard that on July 12, Wandsworth Fire Station, Hammersmith Fire Station, and Paddington Fire Station were used as hubs for batch mobilising. Commander Vitalis introduced Station Commander Jon Singleton who had been present on the night of July 12 at Paddington Fire Station, co-ordinating the mobilisation of officers and vehicles to respond to incidents. The Committee welcomed the knowledge that calls to the LFB were triaged based on priority, with preservation of life being the key determiner in mobilisation.
- 6.4. The Committee welcomed Darsha Gill (Operations Manager, Environment Agency), and Sam Lumb (Deputy Director of Corporate Affairs, Environment Agency), to introduce the Environment Agency (EA) and to provide contextual information about the Environment Agency and its role in flood prevention and management. The Committee heard how the EA's role was to lead on flood risk prevention, primarily for main rivers and coastal areas, whereas local authorities had the lead on surface water, though the EA supported and worked in partnership with other authorities for flood management. The Committee heard how, as such, representatives from the EA were attending this meeting in this supporting capacity and due to the EA's strategic role in flood management. The Committee was however advised that the EA did have a role in emergency response, and so did assist with urgent responses to flooding incidents, for example, supporting with pumping water. The Committee was

informed that the EA had issued multiple flood warnings throughout the period of July 2021.

- 6.5. The Committee welcomed PC Jason Emmett, from the Maida Vale Safer Neighbourhood Team, who spoke on behalf of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). The Committee heard that on July 12, Maida Vale was one of the most severely affected areas, though on July 25, areas such as Kilburn Park Road were hit hardest. The MPS had posted officers on 'reassurance patrols' after the events, with the purpose of reassuring residents who had had to leave their homes that their neighbourhoods were safe and that their properties would remain secure. PC Jason Emmett highlighted how residents had been forced to leave in a hurry, and so had not had the time or ability to secure belongings or take security precautions. The Committee also heard that concerns had been raised by residents that looting may have been an issue, whereas the MPS patrols had allowed residents to feel more assured that they would not be subject to thefts or break-ins if they had vacated their homes.
- 6.6. The Committee commended the collaborative work whereby the MPS had liaised with the Council, Thames Water and other authorities, in order to provide clearance to any workmen or builders who were undertaking repairs in affected areas, and to reassure residents that these teams were indeed legitimate operators, rather than opportunistic criminals.
- 6.7. The Committee was invited by the Chairman to ask questions to any or all of the parties present. The Committee was informed that residents had been invited to submit questions before the meeting via email. And that more than 40 questions had been received. The Chairman highlighted one question, submitted by a resident of Kilburn Park Road, about how Westminster City Council and Thames Water intended to compensate the victims of the flooding, in respect of "emotional hardship, loss of sentimental items, constantly moving between temporary homes, and having to live with the memory" in addition to how they would work with insurance companies to make sure the premium of buildings and content insurance were affordable for those affected, if insurance can still be obtained.
- 6.8. The Committee heard from Raj Mistry (Executive Director of Environment & City Management) on behalf of Westminster City Council, who answered that the welfare of Westminster residents was a priority for the Council, as well as ensuring that support was provided for businesses. The Committee was advised that the Council had provided on-site assistance in the wake of the events, as well as offering free bulky waste collections for residents affected by the floods. Further Raj Mistry advised that 57 Council Tax discounts had been

granted to victims of flooding, and support had been offered to businesses that had applied for hardship relief.

- 6.9. The Committee was then advised by Matthew Rimmer that Thames Water did not believe that any of its assets had failed, and so failures of Thames Water infrastructure were not to blame for the floods. The Committee was further advised that the Independent Review, commissioned by Thames Water, due for publication next year, would indicate whether or not this claim was correct.
- 6.10. The Committee was informed that there were no plans for compensation from Thames Water to affected residents, though were the Independent Review to find that Thames Water's infrastructure or assets had been to blame, then the question of compensation would be revisited. The Committee was informed that Mr. Rimmer had worked at Thames Water for six years, and had only been witness to one such event where compensation had been provided to persons affected by flooding.
- 6.11. The Committee requested advice from the Environment Agency on what measures could be taken by Thames Water to alleviate flooding, especially given that a flooding event of a similar scale had taken place only eight years ago, affecting some of the same areas, and that steps taken thus far by Thames Water had failed. The Committee was informed that the Environment Agency held an overview role, and that the likely issue was sheer capacity in the sewer network, and that on a national scale, similar issues of capacity had caused flooding events in other areas of the country.
- 6.12. The Committee noted its thanks to and commended the London Fire Brigade for the crucial work it had done on the night of July 12.
- 6.13. The Committee also noted that, at the online meeting regarding floods held by Westminster City Council on July 30, Thames Water representatives had indicated that the floods could not have been prevented, but would happen again. Given this, the Committee requested information from Thames Water and Westminster City Council on what measures residents could take to flood-proof their homes, and who should bear the cost of these efforts. The Committee heard from Thames Water informative details about the specifics of the flooding incidents, including how some residents' homes had been flooded by an internal route, as foul water came back up through drains within homes, via showers and sinks. The Committee also heard how in other instances, water had rushed in from the street, seeping through doors or windows and that these two routes of water ingress had different prevention measures. The Committee was informed that, in the case of flooding from internal drains, Thames Water would provide the means to preventing future flooding and that Thames Water had been gathering data on affected properties to assess which homes had been affected this way.

- 6.14. The Committee further heard from Phil Robson that the geography of the flooding events was very small, and that, while there had been a torrential downpour in the north of the City, at the same time the sun had been shining brightly at City Hall in Victoria, for example. Officers advised that it was therefore very difficult to provide specific information on flood prevention, as circumstances varied between areas in Westminster, though Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) were mentioned as one method of storing excess water that has flooded a street, which would provide temporary additional capacity where sewers were overwhelmed. Officers also highlighted how residents could take specific measures within their homes, including waterproof paint, doors with watertight seals to block water penetration, and the raising of plugholes to provide more room for water to rise without spilling over into the property. The Committee was told that conversations would be held between Westminster City Council, Thames Water, and the Environment Agency to determine whether there was a higher risk of flooding that could be applied to Westminster, and what improvements in infrastructure could be made.
- 6.15. The Committee requested further information from Thames Water on the technologies that they would provide to basement flats that were flooded with water from internal drains, and how affected residents could make certain that they were included in this offer. The Committee was notified that the flooding events on July 12 were of a similar scale to those that occurred in 2007, which had led to a large-scale review of flood defences across London, and a series of investment schemes, some of which had been delivered by Thames Water. The Committee heard that the scale of the event had been larger than just Westminster and was advised that the solution, therefore, would also need to be on a scale larger than just Westminster. The Committee heard that, while Thames Water representatives understood that residents were rightly angry that the Maida Vale Flood Alleviation Scheme had not protected them, the storm that had struck on July 12 had been beyond the capabilities of that scheme.
- 6.16. The Committee raised the point that in Thames Water's Interim Report, it was indicated that the Maida Vale Flood Alleviation Scheme would not function correctly if the River Thames was at high tide. The Committee asked whether this was well known by Thames Water, and if so, why it had been allowed to stand. The Committee heard that when the Thames was at high tide, Thames Water was unable to deposit excess water from their system into the river. It was noted that this was unlikely to have worsened the flooding in Westminster due to its physical distance from the river. The Committee was notified that the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham may have suffered worse flooding due to high tides.
- 6.17. The Committee enquired about the insurance claims and premiums of affected residents. From Raj Mistry, the Committee heard that while the Council

could not provide direct payments for any insurance claims, they could provide support and information. From Thames Water, the Committee heard that Thames Water could also not provide direct pay-outs, but that there was a trust fund operated by the organisation that provided financial relief for those facing hardship as a result of flooding, and those residents were welcome to apply for aid.

6.18. The Committee queried the statement in the Thames Water Interim Report that the Met Office had declared that the amount of rainfall seen on July 12 was an event that would only happen once a century and observed that this was not correct, as floods had occurred as recently as 2007. The Committee was challenged in return that if these events were to be more common, a joint effort would be needed to protect residents, not only of Westminster, but of London as a whole, from flooding.

6.19. The Committee was given further context explaining the causes of the floods, including how the direction of the weather had played a role, as the storm moved from north to south, hitting Brent before Westminster. The Committee heard how the sewer network of London also followed this route, meaning that the infrastructure had even less possibility of coping.

6.20. The Committee discussed the possibility of a major overhaul of London's sewer network, considering its age and the considerably lower population it had originally been designed to service. The Committee was informed that while this may be a helpful line of scrutiny, the scale of such a project may prove impossible to deliver, and also would not be a matter for Thames Water alone to consider.

6.21. The Committee then discussed the reality of climate change and the environmental impact of infrastructure, and asked whether the Council could take steps to improve the resilience of the City, such as preventing the paving over of gardens, which would otherwise be permeable and help to alleviate standing water. The Committee was advised that the Council had limited or no powers to prevent the paving over of permeable turf, but that it could ask people to consider their environment and the sustainability of their properties. SUDS were raised as one measure that would provide sustainable water capacity.

6.22. The Committee invited Councillor James Spencer to speak on this topic in his capacity as Cabinet Member for City Management. The Committee welcomed the information that all of the Council's existing large public realm works were including SUDS as a key design element.

6.23. The Committee requested assurance for residents from Westminster City Council officers that Westminster's gullies were cleared regularly and to a high standard. The Committee was reassured that when inspecting gullies, a target of no higher silt level than 70% was expected, and that Westminster's 14,000 gullies were in good working order.

- 6.24. The Committee also raised the installation of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) surveillance near gullies and was advised that this measure was one tool that could help prevent obstruction or wrongful parking on top of lateral pipes or gullies themselves.
- 6.25. The Committee again raised that a resident in attendance had lived in eight different hotels in the past eight weeks. The Committee was pleased to hear that the Council would look at this case specifically in the coming days.
- 6.26. The Committee enquired about the seeming delay in residents' homes being repaired, and asked why many residents were still living in temporary accommodation multiple months after the flooding events. The Committee was given an update from Council officers that 30 residents of properties owned by the Council were living in temporary accommodation, and that their homes were undergoing renovations to make them habitable again, but that there had been an initial delay in commencing works as time had to be allowed for the homes to dry out sufficiently. The scale of the works required was also noted as a reason for the delay to repairs.
- 6.27. The Committee observed that instances of flooding had been severely underreported in Bayswater Ward, and requested that Thames Water factor that into any ongoing or future data analysis. The Committee was informed that Thames Water had received over 1,000 reports of flood damage to date, and that the organisation had implemented a simple Microsoft Form process for residents to report flooding. It was agreed that this form would be distributed at a later date, to improve the data gathered.
- 6.28. The Committee noted that in Thames Water's Interim Report, different actions seemed to take place after an amber warning was declared. The Committee was advised that an amber warning indicated a much greater alarm and a much higher level of alert for Thames Water. Had the amber warning been received earlier, it would have given more notice to the organisation, but may not ultimately have affected Thames Water's response, as the storm was unpredictable, sudden, and explosive.
- 6.29. The Committee expressed that the drainage of storm and sewer water into the Thames must have had severe environmental impacts, and was informed that the Thames Tideway Tunnel was a scheme designed to reduce significantly the frequency of pumping excess water into the river. The Committee was advised that the scheme was expected to begin operating within the next two to three years.
- 6.30. The Committee asked the London Fire Brigade why it had only declared a major incident at approximately 7:45PM on July 12. The Committee heard that major incidents were rarely declared 'at the drop of a hat,' and that due consideration had to be given to the rest of London, so that adequate capacity

and equipment was in place to service the whole of London when addressing the major incident.

- 6.31. The Committee welcomed the commitment of Westminster City Council that it would endeavour to provide answers to the written questions submitted in advance of the meeting as soon as possible, working in collaboration with Thames Water and the other responsible organisations as necessary.
- 6.32. The Committee returned to the topic of insurance, and heard from Councillor James Spencer that it was his intention to develop a strategy with the purpose of ensuring that residents had access to affordable insurance.
- 6.33. The Committee raised that many residents claimed to have been witness to, or had heard second hand, that in the evening of July 12, the London Fire Brigade had arrived on scene at Kilburn Park Road, made an undetermined action, and the water had there after rapidly drained away. The Committee was advised that if the action that was being referred to was in fact the lifting of manhole covers, then this measure could alleviate flooding if the sewer has any capacity, as lifting a manhole cover would have provided an escape route for water.
- 6.34. The Committee was further informed that if Thames Water's modelling was correct, the sewer network beneath Kilburn Park Road was over capacity between approximately 4:30PM and 6:30PM. Later than this time period, the sewer would have had some capacity, and so lifting manhole covers would have been a viable option to begin draining the flood water. However, this option was not always safe and so was not recommended by Thames Water. The Committee was asked for further information about this incident by the London Fire Brigade, as they had extensive numbers of officers on site, and initial investigations into the events of the night had not uncovered the source of this rumour, if it had in fact been witnessed. It was agreed that any evidence of these events should be submitted to the Chairman of the Committee, in order that it be examined and shared with the London Fire Brigade.
- 6.35. The Committee asked Thames Water whether the organisation would inspect affected properties, and install Non-Return Valves at its own cost. The Committee was pleased to hear that Thames Water would undertake this action, although Non-Return Valves would only protect properties from sewer surcharge flooding and the devices would not provide any additional defence from flooding via surface water. The Committee heard that Non-Return Valves operated by sealing off a property's drainage system so that sewer surcharge was not able to flood a home, but that this mechanism carried its own risk: any water draining down plugholes, sinks or drains within the property would have nowhere to go and therefore, the risk of 'self-flooding' would increase when these devices were fitted.

6.36. The Committee enquired about the Independent Review from Thames Water, which would cover multiple affected London boroughs. The Committee was made aware that three independent flooding experts would form the panel for this Review, accompanied by: Thames Water's regulator, The Water Services Regulation Authority (OFWAT); the Greater London Authority; and representatives from the affected London Boroughs, including Westminster.

6.37. The Committee was advised about the state of gullies in the affected areas on July 12 and 25 and how in some instances where gullies had not recently been cleared, this was due to an obstruction by a vehicle or other item that had blocked access, or that the access grates to the gullies were seized shut or stuck. Officers advised that in these instances, a repeat visit was necessary, and special equipment had to be used to provide access to the gullies so that they could be cleaned.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

7.1. The Committee discussed its work programme and discussed establishing a task group to work to protect communities from flooding events, investigate the causes of flooding, and assist residents with insurance claims should be created. The Committee noted that the full report from Thames Water was due in early 2022, and the Committee requested that any other external organisations composing reports on this matter share them with the Committee. The Committee considered reviewing the flooding events at a meeting in 2022, once the Thames Water Independent Review was available. The Chairman advised that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled for 19 October 2021 and thanked all for their attendance.

8. TERMINATION OF MEETING

8.1 The meeting ended at 8.30pm.

CHAIRMAN _____ DATE _____