

## Flood Meeting – Q&A Session – Sturminster Marshall Memorial Hall



**Date:** 26 March 2026 at 7pm

**Panel:** Cllr Sonia Cade (Chair, Sturminster Marshall Parish Council), Justin Neely (Dorset Council – Flood Risk Management), Ian Withers (Environment Agency), Jim Ragglesworth (Environment Agency), Julian Okoye (Wessex Water), Mark Adams (Dorset Council - Highways), Harry Bessent (Dorset Council - Highways)

Cllr Cade opened the meeting (see Appendix 1).

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### 1. Environment Agency

- 1.1 Ian Withers thanked attendees for the strong turnout, noting that it reflects how much the community cares about flooding issues. He emphasised that flooding is an ongoing reality and that building resilience is essential. He expressed sympathy for those affected and explained that, while the Environment Agency’s presence may not always have been visible, this was due to the exceptional and widespread nature of the recent flooding, which affected multiple communities simultaneously. He highlighted that the flood bund helped protect over 100 properties.
- 1.2 The flooding event was caused by a combination of factors, including exceptionally high groundwater levels, elevated river levels, and intense rainfall, with 48mm recorded in a single day. Although groundwater levels are now beginning to recede, community anxiety remains high. Ian stressed the importance of reporting flooding incidents, both to access support and to inform future flood resilience planning. He also noted that property level protection and effective recovery measures are key components of resilience.
- 1.3 Jim Ragglesworth explained that the flood defence scheme, built in 1992, was designed specifically to protect against river flooding and does not

prevent groundwater or surface water flooding. He confirmed that the Environment Agency maintains the flood bund and also undertakes annual autumn vegetation cutting along the River Winterborne, although this is not a statutory obligation. He clarified that landowners have responsibility for maintaining watercourses up to their midpoint under riparian ownership rules. This responsibility does not involve dredging but does require general upkeep. Residents were encouraged to familiarise themselves with riparian responsibilities and to contact the Environment Agency with any concerns about flood defence assets.

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## **2. Wessex Water**

See Appendix 2

- 2.1 Julian Okoye acknowledged the distress caused by the flooding, particularly for residents who experienced sewage flooding, in some cases not for the first time. He explained that “Storm Chandra” resulted in the wettest January on record, creating extreme conditions. Sturminster Marshall is served by four pumping stations, with flows directed to Shapwick and then to Tarrant Crawford. During intense rainfall, the volume entering the system can be up to 100 times greater than normal foul sewer flows, overwhelming the network. High groundwater levels further exacerbate the issue by infiltrating the system, while blockages—often caused by misuse—can reduce capacity.
  - 2.2 He noted that sewer improvement works carried out in Kings Street in 2017 had initially reduced flooding complaints, although issues have since begun to rise again. Recent maintenance has included jetting 150 metres of sewer on High Street and 63 metres on Church Street. Ongoing work includes video surveys of the sewer network, although these must be timed carefully due to groundwater conditions, as well as internal lining of pipes and installation of monitoring equipment.
  - 2.3 Julian explained that the next steps involve analysing collected data and developing a design package for further improvements. He stressed that Wessex Water relies on residents reporting incidents and aims to respond within two hours when issues are raised.
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## **3. Dorset Council – Flood Risk and Highways**

- 3.1 Justin Neely explained that Dorset Council, as the Lead Local Flood Authority, is responsible for managing flood risk from surface water and ordinary watercourses, though not main rivers. The Council works with communities and landowners to ensure drainage networks function

effectively and may use natural flood management techniques to slow water flow where appropriate.

- 3.2 He confirmed that Dorset Council Highways is responsible for managing water on roads, although this is typically a short-term measure, with water discharged into watercourses where possible. Given the severity of the impact on the community, a Section 19 Flood Investigation Report will be carried out to examine the causes and response to the flooding event.
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#### **4. Questions and Answers**

- 4.1 Several residents raised concerns about drainage issues across the village, including areas such as Newton Road, where water is not draining effectively even in non-flood conditions. Dorset Council confirmed that further investigation is required and that jetting works will be arranged for the A350 and Newton Road, extending to the bridge.
- 4.2 It was explained that routine drain maintenance is prioritised on gritting and bus routes, with other drains cleaned annually or in response to reports. Dorset Council currently operates only three jetting units across the county, meaning that reporting issues is essential to ensure they are addressed. Residents were encouraged to report blocked drains via the Council's website or by phone, as unreported issues may go unnoticed.
- 4.3 Debris and gravel from areas such as Straight Mile were identified as contributing factors to blocked drains. Responsibility for clearing roads and pavements lies with Dorset Waste and Dorset Highways, while watercourse maintenance typically falls to landowners under riparian ownership.
- 4.4 The Environment Agency emphasised that the drainage and sewer systems were overwhelmed due to the extreme saturation of the ground. Even if drains had been fully clear, they would not have been capable of handling the volume of water during this event. The flooding occurred in two phases: an initial peak caused by intense rainfall, followed by a delayed rise in groundwater levels, due to full aquifers. It was also confirmed that there are no upstream sluice gates controlling flow in the area.
- 4.5 Concerns were raised about the deterioration of historic ditch systems, which residents reported had previously functioned effectively but are now blocked. Dorset Council and the Environment Agency noted that these systems often fall under riparian ownership, meaning responsibility lies with landowners, although enforcement can be complex in practice.
- 4.6 Recurring problem areas were highlighted, including Newton Road and Balls Lane/King Street, where gully blockages have repeatedly caused flooding. In

some cases, responsibility has been disputed between Highways and Wessex Water. It was agreed that further investigation, including CCTV surveys, is required to identify the root causes.

- 4.7 Residents raised concerns about the speed of road closures during flooding, particularly on Newton Road. It was clarified that while flood wardens can put up road closed signs, they cannot enforce road closures. Driving through floodwater on a closed road can be a prosecutable offence.
- 4.8 The Environment Agency confirmed that a wider Dorset-level review of flood response issues, including road closures, will be undertaken and led by Dorset Council.
- 4.9 Dorset Council advised that drainage investigations are expected to take place in the short term, although some works will require traffic management measures. The Section 19 Flood Investigation Report will be published within nine months of the flooding event and will be publicly available.
- 4.10 It was also noted that similar flooding issues have been experienced in nearby communities, such as Pimperne. A separate meeting will be arranged in future to discuss the relationship between housing development and flooding as part of the Local Plan process. Residents were encouraged to continue reporting issues and to engage with local councillors.

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## **Closing**

Thanks were given to all attendees for their participation and contributions. The meeting closed at 20:19.

## **Appendix 1 – Chair’s introduction**

### **Flood Resilience Meeting Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2026**

Good evening, everyone, my name is Sonia Cade and I am the Chair of the Parish Council. I would like to thank you all for attending this meeting, which has been called following the recent flooding events which have affected our Parish. In the past flooding has been typically fluvial, but this time we have experienced both ground and surface water flooding. Flooding is usually concentrated on the lower half of the village, and east side, with the areas of Combe Almer and Mapperton also being affected. This time, as we experienced in 2014, flooding was particularly severe along the straight Mile, A350, Newton Road and King Street. These areas when flooded combine with the flooding in the lower part of the village, worsening the situation. Many of you will be aware that Sturminster Marshall is a village built on Springs, as highlighted by locations such as Springfield Farm and Dorset springs.

The Parish Council has a Co-Ordinator flood warden Cllr Helen Fookes, who unfortunately cannot be with us this evening, but has sent a report.

The wardens are on hand to offer advice and support. Other flood wardens include Gary Wathen (White Mill), Cath Parslow (Church Street), Jackie Trenchard (Back Lane), Terry Pickford (Back Lane), Adrian Holden (King Street), Tim Weaver (Newton Road), Robert Stephenson (Reeves Orchard), and Hilary Palmer (Kents Lane). We are still seeking a representative from the Newton Road/A350 part of the village to join the team. Flood wardens are volunteers living in the village, each responsible for monitoring a specific area. During flooding events, they report issues to Dorset Council, the police, and the parish clerk. They also maintain communication with one another to quickly assess the overall situation across the village. Over the years, a collection of signs and bollards has been gathered for use in warning residents and road users about flooding. Please note, however, that flood wardens do not have the authority to close roads; this must be done by external agencies.

There are empty sandbags available in a bin by the gate of 3 Kings Street. Residents are required to fill these bags themselves.

Flood wardens aim to work with residents to advise on how to protect their property, businesses and possessions. They encourage residents to sign up to the Flood Line Warnings Service. They have knowledge of the local area and have identified vulnerable properties and roads. They keep an eye on drains and ditches and report blockages to the parish council. However, the ditches that run across residents' land are their responsibility and these need to be maintained by the Riparian owners.

The Council has an emergency flood Plan which can be found on the Parish Council Web page. This is revisited and updated every year. Useful pdf leaflets are published by the Environment Agency about what to do in a flood and useful links for residents to use if they are affected by flooding. The Council also has an emergency Plan which will be updated in the next few months. If anyone has skills that would be beneficial in a time of emergency, please see Alison. The Memorial Hall is a designated refuge centre for Dorset Council, and the Parish, and was used a few years ago when an unexploded bomb was found in Henbury Pits. Residence in the last flood were offered the use of the Memorial Hall and toilets and showers. In a time of Emergency please visit the PC web page where you will find useful contact numbers.

I am now going to hand over to the panel for presentation to address the questions which have already been submitted. If any questions have not been answered in the presentations, there will be a short period for additional questions at the end.