House of Commons

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Climate and weather resilience, HC 1317

Tuesday 18 November 2025

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Mr Alistair Carmichael (Chair); Charlie Dewhirst; Sarah Dyke; Barry Gardiner; Terry Jermy; Jayne Kirkham; Josh Newbury; Jenny Riddell-Carpenter.

Questions 21 - 80

Witnesses

I: Karen Thomas, Head of Coastal Management, East Suffolk Council; Natasha Dix, Service Director for Waste, Environment and Planning, Isle of Wight Council; Rob Goodliffe, Coastal Transition Manager, North Norfolk District Council; and Richard Jackson, Coastal Change Manager, East Riding of Yorkshire Council.

II: Julie Foley OBE, Director of FCERM Strategy and Adaptation, Environment Agency; and Jaap Flikweert, Coastal Representative, Anglian Eastern RFCC, and Flood and Coastal Management Adviser, Haskoning.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– East Suffolk Council

- Isle of Wight Council

- North Norfolk District Council

- East Riding of Yorkshire Council

- Environment Agency

- Haskoning

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Karen Thomas, Natasha Dix, Rob Goodliffe and Richard Jackson.

Q21 **Chair:** Good morning and welcome to this meeting of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee. Our evidence session this morning relates to our inquiry into climate and weather resilience. We are delighted to be joined by colleagues from different parts of the country this morning. You are very welcome. We appreciate your attendance and your input to our work. For the benefit of those who are following our proceedings and for our own official record, I invite you all to introduce yourselves and to tell us where you are from and what you do.

Karen Thomas: My name is Karen Thomas. I head up the coastal management adaptation team at East Suffolk council. I also work with the Coastal Group Network and the LGA Coastal Special Interest Group.

Rob Goodliffe: I am Rob Goodliffe. I am from North Norfolk district council and I am the coastal transition manager.

Natasha Dix: I am Natasha Dix. I am from Isle of Wight council and I am the director for waste, environment, coast and planning.

Richard Jackson: I am Richard Jackson. I am coastal change manager at East Riding of Yorkshire council.

Q22 **Chair:** Thank you all very much for coming and for the evidence you have already given us. I will start with a very general overview, and I will quickly run along the panel so that we get a geographic spread of what the situation is. Could you tell us a bit about the impact of coastal erosion and landslides in each of your local areas? It is all part of the impact of a changing climate. What has that been in your area, and where do you see the future risks coming from?

Karen Thomas: Along the East Suffolk coast we have about 77 km of coastline. It is quite a soft, eroding and low-lying landscape. In terms of our shoreline management plan for the frontage, about two thirds of the policies are for managed realignment and for no active intervention. For many of those policies there is not necessarily an easy mechanism for delivering them.

In terms of the impacts, we have a number of more rural coastal communities that are experiencing erosion risk right now. We are also having to demolish people's properties. Those are the key risks that we have at the moment, with around 80 properties along our coast experiencing erosion risk in the very short term—the next 10 years or so—and up to 240 properties beyond that, and there are maybe more with indirect impacts of erosion.

Rob Goodliffe: In North Norfolk we have about 21 miles of soft cliffs, which have been eroding for a long period of time. We have seen impacts for a long time and have lost probably 40 or so properties in the last few decades. Moving forward, with climate change and sea level rise, we are expecting to lose between 850 and 1,600 homes to 2105. That obviously has impacts on individuals' mental health and wellbeing and on the communities that it is impacting.

It is not just homes; there are roads at risk that link between different settlements, as well as many businesses and historic buildings. We have four graveyards that are at risk from loss over the coming years. Many of these things are interrelated. It is about viability of settlements. At the moment, we may be seeing one, two, three, four properties at risk, and that crops up in the news. But as time progresses and sea levels rise, and because a lot of our sea defences are now ageing and are reaching the end of their lives, we will see an acceleration of losses as they begin to fail.

Natasha Dix: The Isle of Wight is unique in that it is entirely a coastal area, and 65% of our community live within 2 km of the coast. Along our south-west coast we have a rapidly eroding coastline, which is threatening our A roads significantly that connect those areas. However, our most significant issues currently sit within the 12 km stretch known as the Undercliff, which is the largest urbanised landslide complex in north-western Europe. We have over 6,500 residents living within that active landslide area, who are consistently at risk.

Although some parts of that area are on "hold the line" policies, holding the line at the coast does not prevent upper landslide system movement. We have in the last year seen two significant landslides, one in Bonchurch, where we lost 14 million cubic metres of land to the sea. Then, over in St Lawrence, we had an inland landslide and lost seven properties. We have the risk of that moving continually inwards towards the central town of Ventnor.

Dealing with those risks is incredibly difficult, but they also then move further into our A roads around the external ring of the island, which are disappearing, disconnecting our communities. One of those is now permanently closed, on the A3055 and Undercliff Drive. We lost Leeson Road, another A road, at the other end of Bonchurch, for 12 months while we dealt with trying to get that repaired. We got to the point that there were even days when children could not get to school outside of the town because one accident on the road would close it. We are living with risks and change daily in our communities.

Richard Jackson: We are not quite at the level of the Isle of Wight, but in East Riding of Yorkshire we are also pretty much surrounded by water. We have the North sea to the east of our area, which covers about 85 km of coastline, and to the south we have the Humber estuary as well, which provides large amounts of flood risk for East Riding. We are very used to dealing with water risks.

On the open coast, we have about 50 km of rapidly eroding undefended cliff line. The only defended locations are really the three main coastal towns of Bridlington, Hornsea and Withernsea, and the nationally important gas terminal infrastructure at Easington. We have a long history of dealing with areas that are rapidly eroding and that it is not sustainable to defend.

Over the past 10 years we have lost about 66 residential properties, which have had to be demolished. We have also lost some minor roads, which did lead to properties having to be privately relocated to the rear of them. Going forward, we expect to see large numbers of properties lost. Within our own estimates, based on straight extrapolations of historic data—there can be up to about 4.5 metres a year of loss in some areas of our coast—about 127 residential properties are expected to be lost over the next 100 years. Within the national coastal erosion risk mapping, that is much higher. We are having some local analysis done to sort that out and get a true figure.

As well as those residential properties, we have thousands of caravans, which are crucial to the local economy. We also have strategic transport links rather than just the minor access roads that we have lost previously. There are a number of issues going forward.

Q23 **Chair:** As somebody who is coming to this relatively fresh, it strikes me that you have a veritable smorgasbord of programmes, plans, initiatives and all the rest of it. Tell me what strategies local authorities and coastal projects are using to engage communities. That is really what we are talking about here. Natasha, you have already given us a fairly acute picture of the position in your community. How effective is that whole range of measures? Rob, do you want to make a start on that? You do not have to all repeat the same stuff, incidentally.

Rob Goodliffe: Focusing specifically on engaging with communities, we have been doing that in North Norfolk for a long time. It is a long-term thing that you need to do and to continue to resource. What we find is that there are periods when it is funded. We have had different schemes in the past. In 2010 we had coastal pathfinders. We are currently fortunate enough to be part of the Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme, which enables us to put additional resources into engaging with communities. This is about raising coastal understanding and awareness. That is not just with communities, but with other partners as well—councils, utility providers and so on.

It is important to have open and honest conversations around coastal change. The communities themselves have ideas, which are really valuable and which we need to listen to, but we also need to be able to follow up and react to those and take them forward into actions.

All of this does require resources. In periods when we do not have the funding to do it, the amount of engagement declines, because we have to prioritise into other areas where we can make more impact.

Throughout that engagement, we need to be very careful and use clear but considerate language and approaches, to talk to communities in a respectful way. The key thing is that when we do have conversations, they need to lead somewhere. It is very difficult to have a conversation that is meaningful if that then does not go on to anything. We have to follow that up with actions and activities.

Q24 **Chair:** It does come down to resource, then, doesn't it? Otherwise, you get out there, you sing Kumbaya and everybody feels good. However, if it is not actually delivering meaningful change—

Rob Goodliffe: Absolutely right. We need to be able to take forward options and to then support them.

Q25 **Chair:** How well resourced do you individually feel? I will start with Richard this time and go quickly along the panel.

Richard Jackson: Within our core council funding that we get from Government, we have been able to resource one or two officers, depending on each year's settlement over the past 15 years that I have been working there. Currently, within the Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme we are funding or co-funding around 11 officers just to deliver this programme for three years. It is a struggle to deliver it, to be honest, in terms of the operational resources.

Chair: And all the other pressures on local authority financing.

Richard Jackson: Yes. We also call on probably 10 or 12 different teams from across our local authority to deal with coastal erosion issues, which are not funded beyond their regular day-to-day posts.

Q26 **Chair:** Natasha, you are in an even more acute position. You have landslides as well.

Natasha Dix: We are in a far more acute position. We do not have the benefit of that additional funding through the Environment Agency. We are currently sitting with a revenue budget of £80,000 a year for maintenance of coastal defences, with one revenue-funded staff member and one capitally funded staff member making annual capital bids into the council. As a unitary, we do have to prioritise adult and children's social care above non-statutory maintenance. We are working where we can as hard as we can, but it is an incredibly difficult situation to continue maintaining.

Rob Goodliffe: We have a small team, primarily focusing on maintenance of the risk management assets that we do have, many of which are reaching the end of their life. On the policy around the shoreline management plan, we are a lead authority for that as well. As a lead authority, we are not necessarily funded to do that. We have Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme funding money at the moment, so we are able to resource more into the engagement aspects, but without that we would be struggling to take this forward.

Karen Thomas: At East Suffolk council we have a core staff of around 12 or 13 officers, and that includes the six or seven NSIP projects that are going on around our coast. We have a huge amount of energy projects coming in under and through our coast at the moment, which is another part of our workload, looking at the potential impacts of those.

We have also been fortunate with the flood and coastal innovation programme to recruit some additional people. We are trying hard through a restructure at the moment to retain some of the staff we have built those things with, because we want to have legacy. We have learned a lot so far.

I just wanted to say that in the last 18 months, we have done a very quick calculation on engaging with seven property owners we have gone through demolition with. The costs at the moment are coming in at around half a million pounds, and that is not including the additional impacts that we are now starting to work on with the wider council, which is things like housing need. Communities teams being able to offer people options while we are having conversations about demolition is very difficult. Trying to get ahead of the game, and not react, is the tricky bit.

Q27 **Chair:** You lead me very nicely to segue into the relationship between what you are doing at the cliff face, shall we say, and the efforts and strategies from national Government. How is that working? Do you feel that you are well guided and supported? As part of this discussion, people are increasingly identifying the need for there to be a Minister for coastal communities. Is that something that you would see as a positive, or is it another layer—another dish on the smorgasbord?

Karen Thomas: I think many of us would welcome that political oversight. The coast is not just about flood and coastal risk management. It is an incredibly complicated environment. We have ports, and we have energy. In my patch, we have nuclear power stations. All sorts of different things are going on around our coast.

Our experience is that, working with the Environment Agency on the national strategy, we all had the opportunity to influence and inform that strategy. That was a very positive process. There were lots of good hooks in there for adaptation and coastal erosion. So I think the strategy is really positive. That has then led on to the potential for us to have the FCIP and CTAP funds, so that has been another positive approach. The main thing then is that we want to have some certainty over what comes next when we get to the end of the programmes.

At a local level, there are a number of things that could be good opportunities for us. We have devolution and local government reform going on in our area. We all feel that there are opportunities to align funding with regional flood and coastal committees, and the potential to perhaps have an adaptation fund for the coast that could be supported at that level. Then, more locally—certainly from East Suffolk council's perspective—we have the opportunity to influence our local plan, because our review is coming around at the moment. Depending on where your local plan review is at a local authority, I think the ambition of all of us is to embed what we are trying to do from these programmes into our local plans.

Q28 **Chair:** For the benefit of the written record, I have seen a lot of nodding heads as you have been speaking, Karen. Is there anything that the others want to add into the mix?

Rob Goodliffe: As Karen said, it is already embedded in the FCERM Government policy statement that we are going to look to support local areas to transition in the long term and develop long-term plans. It is already in the Environment Agency strategy. We are seeing that through the Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme and the FCIP programmes.

I really want to reiterate the point Karen was making around what comes next. There is a lot of effort and momentum being generated at the moment in our areas. There are things that we want to share, and are sharing, with other parts of the coastline, and we want to see those rolled out and scaled up or developed even further. I think that is a really important thing. It will be a missed opportunity if we are not able to do that and the Environment Agency is not supported in doing that.

Q29 **Jenny Riddell-Carpenter:** Thank you all for being here. Karen, I am obviously the Suffolk Coastal MP, and you and I have worked closely together over the last few months on some of the coastal erosions you have alluded to. For context and for the record, we have some active erosion in my constituency at the moment. Thorpeness is the place that Karen referenced. We have had a lady called Jean Flick lose her home. On 18 October it was demolished. This issue has been going on around Thorpeness for quite a long time. I appreciate you being here, Karen.

There are lots of lessons that can be learned from what we are seeing in Thorpeness, particularly on the community engagement side. I am going to bring out some of those now in my questioning. Just to be clear, this is not aimed entirely at East Suffolk council, and it certainly is not aimed at you, Karen—this is about a multi-agency approach, and we need to make sure that we learn the lessons. I just want to be clear on that.

I did notice that East Suffolk's submission—which is very thorough, and there is a huge amount in it that I agree with—did not mention Thorpeness once at all. I was quite surprised about that because it is obviously the biggest erosion happening at the moment on the East Suffolk coast. There is a lot that has gone wrong with Thorpeness leading up to this point, and there is a lot that can be learned from it. We will delve into that a bit more in a second, but what are your lessons and reflections on Thorpeness and where we have got to at the moment?

Karen Thomas: The community at Thorpeness is unusual, compared with others, in terms of its demographic. There has been an approach there to accommodate a potential community-led approach to slowing erosion. The people who live there clearly have ambitions to slow erosion and protect their properties, which we understand. However, the shoreline management plan policy is for managed realignment to slow erosion, not stop erosion. There are wider impacts to holding the cliffs in places like Thorpeness. So our shoreline management plan already has conflict within it.

The way that a local authority tries to deal with that is to talk about short-term solutions with the community. The difficulty then is that the cost of those short-term solutions is becoming incredibly expensive. Ultimately, for Thorpeness, the only short-term solution that will really work for them is rock, which is not really a short-term solution.

Over the last 18 months to two years, we have seen accelerated erosion on our coast. A number of locations along the coast have experienced high levels of erosion, which are arguably outstripping some of the predictions. Some of the proposals that the community has put forward arguably will not work now.

That is the difficulty that we face. We have to have a decision on what we really mean around the shoreline management plans. We have to be clear with people what the intent of management is. Where it is possible for people to take their own actions, there are consequences for others adjacent, both natural and the built environment.

We did not mention it anywhere specifically, because we were trying to be sensitive about the fact that there were people who were having their properties demolished while we were writing our evidence. It was not an omission; it was actually a choice not to write about a couple of the locations we deal with.

Q30 **Jenny Riddell-Carpenter:** Understood. Thank you. To unpick the issue of Thorpeness and Jean a bit more, one of the biggest lessons—certainly that I have taken away—from this experience is that we have to understand that these people are going through trauma. If that is our starting point, then all our stakeholders and all our engagement needs to fundamentally recognise that. Again, I stress that this is not a direct criticism of East Suffolk council. This is more about a broader strategy that all local and national Governments need to be thinking of. If we are talking about people losing their homes, we have to fundamentally put that trauma first and foremost.

To give you an example of how policy is not fit for purpose, Jean Flick was told that her home would have to be demolished and that she would have to move out while that took place. There are so many bits within this story that do not quite make sense in terms of how things were handled.

Natural England got involved and had to do a flora and fauna assessment of her home before the demolition took place. That made her feel that agencies were taking the wildlife—everything was going to be demolished anyway, because it all faced coastal erosion—and the needs of the fauna and flora more seriously than her own personal needs.

Then they discovered a bat in her roof. After she moved out, two people spent three days monitoring the bat's activity while Jean was physically moved out of her home. She naturally felt from that that the needs of the bats were placed above her own personal needs. You know as well—Jean will not mind me saying this—that she moved into her daughter's home, which is opposite the gate of her house, so she watched all this happen. The trauma was unfolding every single day. She had to physically watch the demolition. She had to physically watch all these assessments take place.

On a human level, it felt that we were not meeting people where they were at during that most traumatic period of their life. That was Jean's family home, which she had had for 20 or 25 years. It felt like the needs of other agencies were put above the needs of her and her family. For context as well, Jean is in her 80s. This was, you can imagine, a horrific thing for her to have to go through, and for her family to have to witness and support her through. What are your reflections on "batgate"?

Karen Thomas: At the end of the day, there are a number of statutory issues that need to be sorted out for us to treat people with dignity. All the things that you have just said are absolutely awful for the staff who were involved. We had conversations with Jean about the demolition of her property, following almost six months of discussion with her about whether there could be local protection. Sadly, the local protection option was not possible, so that led us to the conversations that we had around demolition. We have tried to give people as much time as possible to stay in their homes. We have tried to give people as much time as possible to leave their properties in a dignified way.

This is the first time that we have ever come across the bat issue, and the lesson that we would learn from that is that when our contractors need to go in and demolish properties in future, that will be part of the surveys that are done at the time. I have not rung up Rob or anybody else about this one, because if this had ever come up before, we would already have learned this lesson. It is not lost on us that a bat being in a property became the issue. That is my reflection on that.

Q31 **Jenny Riddell-Carpenter:** Yes, understood. I will move on shortly, but I want to reflect on some of the other traumas that come with this, just to put it on record.

There is an element of tourism trauma. For context, Thorpeness is a big tourist destination on the Suffolk coast. In fact, it is a tourism destination that dates back to the Victorians. It was physically built for tourism. It is a beautiful stretch of coastline. People spend their holidays there, but day trippers will go there.

Once it got into the media that there was active demolition and active erosion, we were seeing people—and local residents were telling me this—taking day trips to go and look at the coastal erosion. They were talking to residents about it, and local residents—Jean and others—were having to relay the story time and time again to these day trippers, who were there just for tourism trauma.

Maybe this is something that other areas have come across, but I think it is worth building into future strategies. Jean and her neighbours had to relive these things every single time. It got to the point where people were practically knocking on doors, saying to them, "Have you seen what's outside your door?" Of course they have, but they feel responsible for telling their story every time to these day trippers who come out for it. Has anyone else had that experience, and is there any way that you can actively manage that?

Natasha Dix: We have had some really significant issues with recent landslides, which we have had to involve the police in. We have had properties that people have had to move out of. The properties themselves are not structurally unsound, so we are not able to say through building control that they are unsafe properties, but the land around them is completely dangerous. As much as we try to keep that out of the press, we have found urban explorers, YouTubers and Instagram accounts. That is while the homes are still moving and collapsing. Seeing people's personal effects, their children's effects, their children's play toys being picked through by a YouTuber, who is then happily displaying that all over the internet, is one of the most traumatic things that our community has had to deal with. The neighbours then have their doors knocked on, and people break into the abandoned house next door in the middle of the night.

There is no safety, because this does not count as breaking and entering unless they have broken and entered. We have found it difficult to help our community through that trauma. We need something to help support people through that situation and to help those properties be secured, even when they are not quite damaged enough to be deemed dangerous buildings but are uninhabitable and still have the possessions of residents within them.

Jenny Riddell-Carpenter: That is shocking to hear.

Natasha Dix: It is awful.

Richard Jackson: As well as tourists and people coming to see, we have very frequent press and academics as well. I think that one of the by-products of this rise in attempts to progress adaptation and coastal transition is that there is a lot of interest from academics and the press. We are having to turn people away who are making documentaries. We do not do any press around property demolitions, to avoid these things. You still get people with drones making YouTube documentaries and things like that. We told our demolition contractors not to talk to anyone, not to allow any drones or anything like that, but then they appeared in one of the documentaries. There is a limit to what you can do, but we try to keep everything as low-key as possible in terms of property demolitions. They are fenced off.

We have a proactive approach as well to demolition. We base it on the maximum loss that we have ever seen in that particular location. Once a cliff gets to within a certain distance of the property, that property is served with a legal notice. The idea is that that property might be there for another five years if erosion is very slow, but equally it could go overnight because we have seen things go overnight. The key thing for us is reducing that risk to life. We do have to act fairly quickly. But that trauma and that wraparound care is something that we are all working very hard on across the CTAP and FCIP projects. It is part of our day-to-day work; we can provide financial assistance, but it is a very traumatic process. That period before, during and after is critical to the work we are doing.

Rob Goodliffe: Through our CTAP project, we have been able to provide some additional wellbeing support to some of our local communities, but also one-to-one support for some individuals as well. Interestingly, it had a mixed response initially through the media, with the question as to why we were spending money on that and perhaps not providing assistance to individuals—actually, we were doing both.

Now that it has been implemented, we have found that it has been really valuable, with the benefits recognised by various community members. It is also useful for our team to be able to direct people towards that. We are talking with people who have trauma and challenges around that, so to be able to direct them towards that support and for them to know that it is there is extremely valuable.

Another key point is that if we are getting to a stage as a nation where properties are being lost over a cliff and we are having these damaging things for the individuals in the media, on YouTube and so on, we need to be more proactive. We need to have real options available to households so they can make decisions earlier and have choices, so that these properties are managed earlier and individuals have real choices over housing options and so on that they can take forward. One size does not fit all.

Chair: These individual traumas in communities then have an impact on the further engagement, so it is necessary that we understand the very direct individual impact, because it is not just on individuals.

We are going to move on now to questions around incident response and recovery.

Q32 **Sarah Dyke:** First, it is shocking and heartbreaking to hear some of the stories that you have just outlined. I find it really traumatising to hear of family homes lost and the impact on communities.

There is obviously some confusion around which agencies are responsible for the different elements of the response to incidents relating to coastal erosion and landslides. The brunt of that expectation clearly falls on local authorities in the main. What can affected individuals expect from the different responders?

Karen Thomas: For East Suffolk, we work with Suffolk county council. The various councils in the Suffolk region contribute to a joint emergency planning unit that deals with all emergencies. What we try to do is avoid the emergency situation, through the things we have all been describing. Certainly, with the work we have been doing more recently, we have been looking at transition plans, trigger levels, giving people advance notice of when they might be likely to lose their property and, as Richard said, giving them the time to remain in their property for as long as possible.

What we are all trying to avoid is the emergency situation that we see in the press, where houses are going over the edge on to beaches as a result of a storm. We have definitely all moved a long way forward on that side of things. But we do have emergency plans in place. An individual should be having those conversations through the local authority, around the erosion risk side of things.

The complications with multiple agencies tend to come in more when we talk about what we can and cannot do on the beach, if people are looking for defence options. That links in more with things like the Marine Management Organisation, Natural England and the Environment Agency. There are challenges around the different agencies that are involved in some of the things that can happen on the coast, but when it comes to an actual emergency, most of us have emergency plans in place with the appropriate authorities. But we like to try to avoid the emergencies.

Rob Goodliffe: Before the Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme, under business as usual, you are quite right that a lot of it always falls to the local authority. We would be looking to go out and speak to individuals to try to negotiate a voluntary movement from the house if possible. But that is very difficult when they might have limited places to go.

Within our own organisation, we liaise with environmental health. Any issues relating to wildlife, communications and so on we do now consider. This does not necessarily lead to the right outcomes for the communities and individuals themselves. Fortunately, through CTAP at the present time, we have a scheme for the most imminently at-risk properties, where we can offer a few different options: a purchase of the property or a planning replacement opportunity, which can then open up other opportunities for people to meet their different housing needs. Without that, the alternative is them meeting their own needs with relatives and so on, or through our social housing registers, which people often do not want to do—it is not people's first choice and it is also oversubscribed already. That is a real challenge, along with our temporary housing.

It is that proactive response that is the important thing, and that is what we should be moving towards as a Government to support people in this situation.

Natasha Dix: In terms of the emergency response, when we do have unexpected emergencies with significant landslides, the initial response does tend to be the blue-light response. In our recent major landslide, we had 20 properties evacuated by the police. Then, it very much falls to the local authority to become the recovery body and to be that person who stands there in the street and starts discussing with people: "Can you stay in your home? Can you leave your home? Do you have somewhere to go?"

One of the big issues we are all facing is the housing shortage, which means that temporary accommodation, when you are asking people to find somewhere else to move in an emergency situation, is incredibly difficult. We have temporary accommodation now, utilising holiday camps, because we have run out of temporary accommodation. But those holiday camps are equally sat on the coast and eroding, but they are not sat within the SMP structure as something that is in a "hold the line" area, because they are small businesses; they are not domestic properties.

Utilities are a huge issue for us locally on the Isle of Wight. We need to ensure that companies such as Southern Water make sure they do not have leaks into areas where we have groundwater causing landslides and active erosion. We have had a few cases in our community where residents have successfully taken Southern Water to court because its leaking pipes have accelerated the coastal erosion and caused properties to fall into the ocean. It is an important part of that wider piece to understand what each of the risk management authorities' roles is, and how they are actively and proactively ensuring that their utilities under the ground are not contributing towards the risks we have and the big issues surrounding them.

One of the greatest issues we face is the data gaps. It is expensive to have live monitoring of the coastline and of active systems. We need to find some way of having better predictions and better predictive certainty over when incidents will occur or when rapid erosion and rapid landsliding will occur. We need to consider on a national scale how we do that predictive live monitoring and support all our community areas in understanding when something is going to happen, so that we can be more communicative to everyone and let them know when to move.

Richard Jackson: In East Riding we have a very precautionary approach. We have never had an incident where a property has got to the level of risk where the emergency services would need to be involved. It has always been very proactive from that perspective. During storms such as the tidal surge in 2013, we did evacuate a number of properties at the highest level of risk, as part of our wider emergency planning routine.

A key point is that erosion does not necessarily come along with storms. We have had storms. In 2013 there was a massive flood risk issue for the Humber, and we expected it to be bad, but the wind was in the right direction for us and we saw very minimal erosion. Then you might see massive erosion over a winter that is particularly benign or when there are not that many named storms. It depends very much on wind direction, sea levels and things like that as to when the erosion happens.

Erosion incidents are pretty much every day. We have hundreds of them along our coast every single day. It is just whether it hits in front of where a property is that is the issue. It could be that you have a day planned and then you get a phone call at 9 o'clock saying there has been a loss at a golf course, a residential property or a caravan park, and you have to go out and look at that and respond. So there is a reactive element, and there is always going to be, but we are as proactive as we can be to minimise the risk of something happening, to give us time to then relocate someone, and to do all that support and talking with them. That is where we are all trying to get to.

Q33 **Sarah Dyke:** I represent a landlocked constituency in Somerset, Glastonbury and Somerton, but we do have a large coastal area to the north of the county. We have not lost any homes to coastal erosion, but we have lost a key part of the B3191, which runs into the community of Cleeve Hill, near Watchet. It was closed back in January 2023. There is always that confusion, isn't there, over who is responsible for a road closure? The council put a temporary closure in place, but now it has gone to permanent closure, because of the ongoing coastal erosion in that area.

The landowner has been quite unwilling to act. Obviously, the council wants to be more proactive. When there is that conflict between the landowner and the agencies that are managing coastal erosion landside, what responses and recovery are available to you, and how can that be improved?

Richard Jackson: This is something we are looking at at the moment with our strategic transport links that are at risk. We are trying to put that buffer in place. We know that it could take 10 years-plus to relocate a road or to improve the diversions, so we need to put that buffer in place.

In terms of legislative powers to deal with coastal erosion, it is very minimal. We have the Coast Protection Act, but that is very much focused on defences. We use the Building Act for property demolitions, but it only applies to structures. For anything else that is on the cliff—utilities, caravans—we do not have any powers to force anyone to remove those. It is very much about working with those stakeholders.

As a unitary authority, we do have responsibility for those roads. We take the same approach as with properties, where we close them when it gets to a certain distance off the cliff edge. But we are trying to get to the point where it is much earlier.

This does lead on to the point about the stakeholders and the responsible bodies. DEFRA and the Environment Agency are the key ones we have been dealing with for many years on this, but the issues we are looking at are social, transport and education in some cases, where schools are at risk. There needs to be a cross-Government look at what is at risk where and how they can support this issue.

Natasha Dix: The highway issue is particularly pertinent for much of our areas. Within the Undercliff, we have a significant number of retaining walls that retain the roads, and walls that retain gardens above walls. We currently have an ongoing case in one area, where the landowner is still, after over 12 months, denying responsibility for his land, which has fallen and closed the highway. We have to rely on going through the magistrates court process to establish ownership of that piece of land.

Equally, when it comes to much larger pieces of our road infrastructure, we have areas of road at the top of our landslide complex where the landslide is moving away from the geology behind it, and where there is consistently a section of road that you can watch bow when you go over it on a bus. Sitting underneath that are the main sewer systems and the main water systems coming in and out of the town.

We then also have the ongoing conversation with major landowners such as the National Trust. Our entire south coast road, the A3055, known as the Military Road, is now within 3 metres of the cliff line at places. Without that road, we would need major diversions, and it would take over £20 million to build a new road going in a different direction. To try to manage those conversations, we now have a quarterly landslide and coastal loss forum, which all major landowners, activist groups, local councillors and ward members are invited to, to make sure we can have those proactive conversations before we get to the point of no return when it comes to those highway issues. None the less, there is no funding for some of those highway gaps.

Sarah Dyke: Thank you. Is there anything else that you want to add to that, Rob?

Rob Goodliffe: I concur with all that.

Chair: We are going to be pressed for time, and we have a lot of areas that we do need to cover.

Q34 **Sarah Dyke:** Just on that, it is very clear that without central Government funding, our local authorities are in a very difficult place to support activity. I know that the lead member, Richard Wilkins, at Somerset council has written to the Government to make exactly that point—that the local authority needs that funding to support the coastal erosion work that needs to be done.

As my final question, many local authorities suggest that they would prefer to work more proactively on coastal management. What do you feel the key barriers are to doing that? What would that proactivity look like?

Karen Thomas: I think it is about how we value the coast. I do not think it is being properly valued as a national asset. As a result, I think we are underestimating the level of investment that is required. Where we have our erosion and flood risk issues on the east coast, it is hard to know what you should be investing in a place under the current Treasury rules we have. Ultimately, for most of our coast, the things that we have at the coast have a value. You cannot have a port inland; you have to have a port at the coast. You have the nuclear power stations and the offshore wind energy companies coming in, over and through it.

In terms of what we need, it has been mentioned already. Shoreline management plans really do clearly set out quite a number of things that different Government Departments might need to support. The south-west is a good example of the train lines going through Dawlish and places like that. It was recommended that those things be moved, and we have heard the cost of that. It keeps putting the problem back at the coast.

We have to have a bit more of an honest conversation about what we want our coast to do for us as a nation and how we want to value those things. The coast has a lot to offer, and it is an important place for a number of different industries. Ultimately, we can get our coast to adapt and we can make it more resilient, and we have tools that we are starting to develop to do that, but somehow it has to be funded. Arguably, the way to do it is that whoever is benefiting most from the coast needs to contribute more. That would help us with the individuals losing their homes.

Sarah Dyke: Chair, I am conscious of your advice on timing.

Chair: If there is anything that has to be said, we need to hear it, but we do not need to hear it from everyone.

Rob Goodliffe: I will just highlight the ongoing nature of coastal erosion. It is consistent, it is happening all the time, and we need to resource it consistently. If it is a flood risk frontage, that is nationally funded. If it is erosion risk frontage, it is locally funded and the funds need to be found locally, unless there is a national programme. Further support to do that would be beneficial. The Government has already said it wants to support communities through this change. I think it is also about setting the parameters of how far the Government want to support this as well.

Chair: Thank you. We will now move on to questions around financial and relocation support.

Q35 **Barry Gardiner:** Thank you very much for the evidence you have given so far. The purpose of this is obviously that the Committee makes a report recommendations. I think we were all struck by the example that my colleague Jenny gave. Do you think the Committee should make a recommendation that there should be a legal protection for properties that are served notice of demolition, or are subject to the land being in danger, so that the things you were talking about, with people going in and trashing people's property, are not allowed?

Natasha Dix: I would absolutely endorse a legal protection for anyone's property, yes.

Barry Gardiner: Thank you. I was confident you would, but you have to say it—I cannot say it—for us to incorporate it into the report.

Natasha Dix: I have sat in someone's living room with them crying on an Easter Sunday afternoon, so absolutely.

Q36 **Barry Gardiner:** Thank you very much. CTAP—the Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme—is limited to just four regions. How do other local authorities support people who are faced with the loss of their homes because of landslip and erosion? Is there national guidance?

Natasha Dix: No. We have a lot of work that we have done over the last 10 years. We used to have a part of our council called the Isle of Wight Centre for the Coastal Environment in which we put a lot of research papers together through European funding. That helped us to work through what our risk management strategies are as a coastal community that does not have any particular funding towards these areas. The majority of what we pull together is through the blood, sweat, tears and compassion of the staff of the Isle of Wight council, who will happily work well above and beyond their core hours, duties and responsibilities to sit in people's houses all weekend, to turn up at 3 o'clock in the morning or to deal with Calor gas bottles rolling down a hill. It is down to the dedication of individuals rather than any actual funded programme.

Q37 **Barry Gardiner:** I am sure we would all want to thank, through you all, the officers who do that for the commitment they make. However, let me come back to the question: is there a national strategy, and should it be a recommendation of this Committee that there is one?

Rob Goodliffe: Through CTAP and the wider FCIP projects there is lots of learning that is transferable to other locations. These things have been set up to help create that and shape the way forward. What we need to be doing and thinking about now, before we finish, is what happens afterwards. What happens in our localities? Do we just finish and drop back to normal? Hopefully not. Hopefully, we can carry on delivering and building on what we have done and generated with our communities, but also share that more widely with other locations, which I know are looking at what we are doing and want to take those activities forward as well. That needs to be built into our processes, policies and funding so that it can be rolled out.

Natasha Dix: Rolled out as a national strategy for us all.

Karen Thomas: I think we all feel that adaptation is not a project in the same way that you would do "hold the line" and capital schemes. It is a cultural shift. The reason why so many of us in the room today are here and all give the hours that we give is that that is the only way we are going to get the shift. It is about engaging people who are incredibly vulnerable when you are talking to them. We want to get to a point where we have those conversations earlier with people.

Right now we have examples on our coast where we are talking to people about literally the demolition of their home. At the same time, through the programmes we are working on, we are trying to get 10 years ahead. As soon as you have a conversation with the community about what is going to happen in 10 years' time, it requires almost the same level of engagement, because they are going to have all the same questions, even though it is not an emergency or it is not urgent.

With the strategic approach we are trying to take through the programmes we are being funded for at the moment, there is another 10, 15, 20 years- worth of work to get this to a business-as-usual-type approach.

Richard Jackson: The willingness is there across the existing flood and coastal erosion risk management strategy. It recognises the need for adaptation, but there is currently no "how we do that". That is what CTAP is. One of the recommendations in the evidence we provided was around the shoreline management plans. The recent shoreline management plan refresh established a list of sub-headings underneath "hold the line" or active intervention. However, there was not one for adaptation; it was do nothing. That completely misrepresents the situation in areas where you cannot defend, as if there is no cost in those areas.

Q38 **Barry Gardiner:** Let me ask you to highlight the key lessons that you would wish to take out from CTAP and other trial relocation schemes that may have happened. What are the best options for supporting people through the loss of their property? Which ones would you want to see rolled out into a national programme? Can you briefly highlight those?

Karen Thomas: I think we need an adaptation fund, and that does not necessarily mean we want more funding from central Government. We just need support to create funds within the regions and within the areas that we work in. Arguably, we do not need a national adaptation fund at the moment, because not everywhere is experiencing problems at the same time.

I think there are opportunities to work across Government on supporting and encouraging some of the developments that are going on around our coast to contribute towards that. It is quite hard for us to do that at local authority level. If we had an adaptation fund where beneficiaries who are benefiting from our coast were paying into a central pot that we could grow within our regions with the mechanisms that are available to us, that would allow us to direct funds to individuals and communities to support them, outside of the issue of compensation.

Q39 **Barry Gardiner:** That is a really interesting proposal. Can you identify who the class of beneficiaries would be that you are talking about?

Karen Thomas: At the moment, if you are at erosion risk, the shoreline management plan requires you to get out of the way so the cliff can erode, so that the whole coast can benefit from that sediment. When we have managed realignment for salt marshes, we can give a landowner some funds to knock a hole in their wall or create a salt marsh area. That has been well established through the Environment Agency's natural flood management programme. We would like something equivalent for erosion risk. The sediments go into natural defences. They feed habitats. They are good for tourism.

We need to start to consider some of the people who use our coast, and a lot of large companies and organisations need to be based in our area. Infrastructure and development needs to start to play the adaptation game, too. There is a very limited feedback loop in terms of those who are going to benefit financially from our coast putting into really helping the people who are worst affected.

Q40 **Barry Gardiner:** That is very helpful. I want to move on to Mr Goodliffe. In Happisburgh I think you have had a relocation scheme that paid up to 40% of property prices there. How can those schemes be safeguarded against potential exploitation—people who might want to buy up land and properties they consider could be subject to these measures later, in order to profit? How have you gone about managing that potential financial risk?

Rob Goodliffe: Over a number of different projects back in 2010, 2012, through pathfinder, we have purchased a number of properties from people at risk and then set about relocating them on other land. That is relocating the properties, not the people. They took a financial value and then moved on and made their own choices. Through Coastwise we have provided options for those most immediately at risk so that they can then move, and we can hopefully vacate the properties before they are lost.

We are also using all that learning to develop other options. The leading one that we would like to see taken forward, although it does not fit within the timescales of CTAP, is around an insurance scheme whereby a payment is made to enable those individuals to make choices. That is many years in advance, so that then overcomes some of the issues around long-term impacts to wellbeing. People can make long-term planning choices around their options.

How do you safeguard that? It is around how you set it up and the rules that you set up within that. I also think we need to ask whether it is a bad thing if somebody within a risk zone—at risk in, say, 10 to 15 years—is able to sell their home. Their home may not be appropriate for them any more, so they might need a bigger home or a smaller home. They still need to be able to sell it on. Some of these things can enable those individuals to move on. However, somebody else moving in may know the risk, and that level of support may be the same or it may be lower. For example, the support for demolition may still need to be there, but at the moment they would not qualify under the coastal erosion assistance grant, which has a cut-off of 2009.

If some of those things are in place, it might enable people to move on earlier and for other people moving in to do that making choices, living in that coastal location and keeping it vibrant, rather than having the spiral of decline that you may get. I think there is a balance to be had.

Barry Gardiner: I am seeing nodding across the board.

Richard Jackson: We are looking at similar options to the ones that Coastwise is exploring in Happisburgh. We are looking at eligibility criteria for those to avoid that. In the most recent one we have been looking at, we are suggesting the date of the publication of the national coastal erosion risk maps, which was in January this year, because that is when that risk was wider known. However, we know that the conveyancing system does not work for coastal erosion. Land search does not work for coastal erosion. Trading standards does not have any current rules around what estate agents need to tell people. You can use eligibility criteria and dates, but until all that is sorted, there will still be people buying properties without knowing the risk.

Q41 **Barry Gardiner:** Now those maps have been produced, do you believe that there should be a requirement at the conveyancing stage of a property to notify a potential purchaser, just as you would if it was on a floodplain and so on?

Rob Goodliffe: There is a consultation out at the moment with the Competition and Markets Authority around material information for properties for estate agents. We will be responding to that and suggesting strongly that this should be material information and that estate agents should be disclosing it at that very early stage.

Q42 **Barry Gardiner:** Is that another recommendation you would like to see this Committee make?

Rob Goodliffe: It absolutely is, please, to make sure that that happens.

Barry Gardiner: That is great. I am just trying to make the Chair's life easier for him when he is drafting this report.

Rob Goodliffe: Do you mind if I add that it also needs to have the enforcement to back it up?

Q43 **Barry Gardiner:** Thank you very much for that. The big question is always around insurance. We have received lots of questions about why there is Flood Re but nothing for landslip and coastal erosion. There have been grey areas where insurers have refused to pay out—they cover landslip but not coastal erosion. What do you make of the proposal to have a Flood Re for coastal erosion, if I can put it that way?

Rob Goodliffe: This is a piece of work that we are currently doing, looking at this in a national context. Flood Re is fixing a market failure for uninsurable flood risk areas. We have had a situation where we have had a property owner with home insurance, and in that home insurance he is paying the Flood Re premium, except that as his property is lost, it does not get classed as a landslip, which would have been insured; it is coastal erosion, and he is uninsured, although he is paying for somebody else's risk as well. It is an area that is being looked at. It will not happen without Government support to take that forward. Internationally, insurance does not cover erosion at this stage. If we want to see that as a mechanism, it will need Government support.

Q44 **Barry Gardiner:** The French have "catastrophe naturelle", don't they, which is a similar reinsurance scheme. But it is predicated on a very small premium being paid across the board by all householders. Again, would you like to see a recommendation from this Committee that there should be some form of wider insurance? You are all nodding furiously but you need to say it—we want it on record.

Natasha Dix: We would want to see that not only for homeowners but also for renters who lose everything they have when they are renting. That is one of the things that we do see as a gap is those renters. They do not own the home with the house insurance, but they do have the contents, and the contents often are not covered.

Q45 **Barry Gardiner:** I believe that, in the Isle of Wight, you have now a whole postcode after the Ventnor—

Natasha Dix: PO38, yes. In the 1980s PO38 was considered an area of blight, and we spent a significant amount of time getting geotechnical, geomorphological and ground behaviour mapping as well as planning guidance maps for the entire 12 km stretch of landsliding, which allowed us to engage with the insurance companies and to say to them, "These are the areas that have relative stability. These are the areas that do not have relative stability." That guides our planning guidance and the insurance industry. It will be an important part of anything that we do going forward, if there is to be an expansion to Flood Re, to ensure that we have that behaviour mapping in place to support people being able to live in areas that may, on the surface, have instability issues, but that are relatively stable when you look at them from that wider geotechnical position.

Q46 **Barry Gardiner:** After the Ventnor incident, have they not now flagged the whole PO38 as a problem area?

Natasha Dix: Yes. My insurance has gone up significantly. The whole of PO38 has gone back up since that time, not to the point of blight, although we are very cautious about how we communicate, because we do not want that 6,500-person community going back into a stage of blight. But, yes, it has gone back up, and we are now getting new mapping to help calm the market back down again.

Q47 **Barry Gardiner:** It is that arbitrary fluctuation in people's insurance that a wider scheme would manage and cope with?

Natasha Dix: It would manage it. It would stop your 80-year-old single occupancy lady having a £5,000 premium on heave.

Q48 **Barry Gardiner:** Finally, the coastal erosion assistance grant to support safe demolition of at-risk properties is only available to those properties before 2009. Do you think that that cut-off date is still justified?

Natasha Dix: No.

Barry Gardiner: Or should there be almost a moving cut-off date because, as you have pointed out, things change in this area? Areas that were previously deemed safe are no longer, so should there be flexibility on that?

Chair: I think we can take a yes or a no on that, and I am guessing it is a no—okay. I am keen to get to Charlie's section very quickly, because we only have 15 minutes left, but Jenny wanted to ask a very quick follow-up.

Q49 **Jenny Riddell-Carpenter:** This can be a yes or no answer. Karen, you alluded earlier to infrastructure projects that could help pay for some of this stuff. Are you saying it is National Grid, Sea Link, LionLink and Sizewell C that could be part of the solution in the Suffolk case? Yes or no?

Karen Thomas: It is yes, but can I just add a tiny bit? If we want developers to come to our region and to have a prosperous economy in the east, we must make sure that that is being applied fairly to developers around the country. That is why I think there is a national element to it, which is, what do we want and what can we ask of people who want to develop around the coast?

Chair: Charlie, you have been a model of patience. We now come to operational delivery of adaptation.

Q50 **Charlie Dewhirst:** Thank you, Chair. I will try to keep this brief. I will come to Richard first as the obvious avenue for this question. We accept we cannot defend every inch of the coastline, and in East Riding that is particularly obvious where, as you have alluded to, they have coastal defences around Bridlington, Hornsea and Withernsea, to the detriment perhaps of some of the other areas. How effective do you feel those defences around the towns are, and are they detrimental or do they speed up erosion elsewhere?

Richard Jackson: They are very effective at what they do, in terms of protecting those towns. With all the defences, there has been slight creep either side of them, which means that, with outflanking in the future, they will be at risk. I think that in the very long term—hundreds of years—we will have to seriously look at erosion around those defences. We cannot keep on extending them, as we have in the past, to protect them from outflanking.

As to the impact elsewhere, that is an issue. If we were to try to protect more areas, it would not be allowed, for that reason among many reasons. One of the other reasons is the wildlife, which we have discussed before. We quite often get birds versus people, because the sediment that comes from our coast is needed to maintain habitat in the Humber and elsewhere.

The shoreline management plan is key to everything we do, and that is the document that says we can only defend certain areas because of the impact on other areas, because of the cost and because of the maintenance of internationally designated habitats. It is about what we do in those areas we cannot defend, and it is about that whole area.

One of the key things that we want to get across, and that we have heard in our work, is that even those defended towns are suffering from coastal erosion because they are reliant on tourism. If the caravan sites and the roads outside of those defended frontages are losing those assets, that tourism is affected. Similarly with the farmland and all the other assets in the undefended frontages, we cannot assume that there is no impact on the defended towns.

Q51 **Charlie Dewhirst:** When we saw that new analysis done of future erosion, it was quite extreme on the east coast. Is that taking into account what we are already doing? Are you more optimistic that it will not be as severe around the towns as we saw on the mapping?

Richard Jackson: It is notoriously difficult to predict erosion around the edges of defences. Generally, you do see slow erosion at the north end, and increased erosion at the south end, but it is very difficult to predict. The mapping that came out had quite a blunt approach to that, in that it is a pretty much straight line inland where the defences stop, because it is a national model, and there are restrictions on how much you can do from that perspective. It is about that ongoing monitoring and the national coastal erosion monitoring programme is a massively valuable tool for us in terms of seeing what is going on, on an ongoing basis.

Q52 **Charlie Dewhirst:** Perhaps I can widen it out to local authority level. Do you feel that you are resourced adequately, or as best as you can be? Obviously, we would all like more money to do more, but can you give us a picture of how you see the next five or 10 years?

Richard Jackson: Well, March 2027 is quite a threshold in terms of the CTAP funding, as others have said. There is not much certainty beyond that. We are looking at other options around combined authority funding, RFCCs, the energy sector. Similarly to Suffolk, we have a lot of that in our area, so how can we fund this going forward?

Until we have certainty on future funding and how we can engage, we do not know. We have done a lot of engagement over many years, but unless you have something to offer people beyond that engagement, you are effectively telling them that their house is going to be lost and we cannot do anything about it, which has negative impacts. We come back to that trauma issue, until you can offer people an option and a way out of that situation.

Beyond the individual, Mr Gardiner asked about beneficiaries. We are very much focused on individual households, but when we are losing roads, businesses, properties, community and heritage assets, the landscape people have grown up with, and farmland, that is death by a thousand cuts for whole regions, not just individuals, and we need to build that into our business cases and into our funding.

Q53 **Charlie Dewhirst:** Even then, I suspect you cannot just build the defences overnight, so you are going to lose—if it takes two years, it will be another 10 metres.

Richard Jackson: We had a 400-metre rock armour extension at Withernsea. It was £7.5 million nearly, and it took more than three years getting it.

Charlie Dewhirst: Does anyone else want to come in on this wider point of long-term funding? If not, I will hand back to the Chair.

Chair: Thank you very much, Charlie. From the East Yorkshire coast to the south-west. Jayne has some questions on coastal development.

Q54 **Jayne Kirkham:** I live in Cornwall, so I was going to ask a bit more about housing and planning going into the future. We are still seeing houses built around our coast that are maybe in those managed realignment areas, or the roads right next to them are in those managed realignment areas. How are local authorities balancing the need to manage future erosion and risk with housing targets? When local plans are being looked at—because a lot of them are coming to an end—what consultation is in place to support planning authorities in looking at coastal developments into the future? Could they have more help with that?

Karen Thomas: There is certainly a lot of pressure to build more houses. If you are in a coastal region, as I was saying earlier, you need to have housing near the coast to service the jobs and the various things going on at the coast. There is a bit of a conundrum about putting people at risk with your developments.

One thing we have been doing ahead of our local plan review for East Suffolk council is using the Environment Agency’s rapid assessment pathways approach. It is a very useful tool that the Environment Agency has developed for fluvial situations, and we are trialling it for the coast. What that is allowing us to do is to have meaningful conversations with our planners and our housing teams and to start to demonstrate that there is basically a pathway and that if you make this decision, there might be other options, but if you make this decision, that is where it ends.

Ultimately, the biggest challenge we have in our patch is the demand for land, with all the NSIP projects. There is a large housing allocation that we need to deliver already, and talking to our housing teams early is demonstrating, as we have heard already, that our council housing offer for people who are going to lose their homes is already overstretched. There is an 18-month waiting list just to get on to the housing list, so when it comes to an emergency, it is difficult.

One of the things we have recently recognised, in the last couple of weeks, is that we will need to build more houses for ourselves to accommodate people who are affected by climate change impacts, and there is no plan for how we fund that and how we deal with it.

Basically, we have an opportunity with our local plans to embed our shoreline management plans into them. In terms of supplementary planning documents, which Rob and others have worked really hard on, we have some good guidance in our area about what you do and do not develop in the coastal zone. But it is always about that balance between not blighting places and allowing some development to happen to provide accommodation for those who are going to work and live on the coast and contribute to it, as well as, now, trying to accommodate people who are going to lose their homes.

Richard Jackson: One of the key issues we have come across when we have been relocating people previously is that the majority of the council housing that people have to go into—there is no compensation or insurance, so they overwhelmingly have to go into council housing—tends to be in the bigger towns. We have a very rural coast, and it is a big change of lifestyle for people moving into those locations, which they often have to do. It is moving people away from support networks, schools and employment, and it is a massive social issue, with a complete change in people's lifestyles. It is not where they want to be, in a town. They want to be in the open countryside, but there is very little private development, because our coastline is a very rural and deprived area.

What we are doing through our Changing Coasts East Riding project is working with the housing associations, which have contributed to the development of nine social affordable housing properties in one of our coastal villages. We are doing a housing needs survey for our entire coast, so we will know how many properties are at risk. It will also tell us where people want to go and what properties they need. We are also working with our own internal council housing team to look at whether we could contribute to the purchase of existing properties in coastal villages.

Q55 **Jayne Kirkham:** I suppose I was looking at it from a slightly different angle. In Cornwall, people are still building luxury apartments and things right on the coast, and it is that development that does not seem the most sensible, and that we would be looking at curtailing a little bit. As of 2021, less than 6% of the coast was in a coastal change management area. That does not seem very much. What factors are stopping those CCMAs from being implemented?

Natasha Dix: One of the largest factors we see is the statutory requirement to have those areas is set within the planning policy and the plans, but what we do not have is the match funding on the other side for delivery of those adaptation plans when they come into place. Getting our planning policies through the various steps to being an adopted plan takes time. We need to get them adopted so that we can move forward with those adaptation strategies.

Q56 **Jayne Kirkham:** So it is the funding to carry out the recommendations in the shoreline management plan?

Natasha Dix: And in our planning policy documents as well.

Q57 **Jayne Kirkham:** And the resources to redraft the planning policy documents?

Natasha Dix: Ours at the moment is just going back to the inspector, and we have put those policies in place, but once they are in place, it does not bring any additional funding in terms of delivery on the other side of the table. We could all say, "Yes, it is great that we have coastal adaptation areas," but that does not say to your coastal teams what they can do to start those realignments and start that adaptation, nor does it provide anything to homeowners who need to adapt and build elsewhere. So it is part of the puzzle, but it is not the complete puzzle that needs to be solved to support that wider economic and housing situation for people who live in coastal areas.

Rob Goodliffe: I was going to say that CCMAs are part of the picture, and one of the tools in the toolkit to help us take forward coastal transition by limiting more things being put in the risk zone, but also by enabling things to move out of it as well. National planning policy guidance gets interpreted in different ways in different places, so I think more work could be done thinking about a more national approach. There is always going to be slight local variation, so rolling it out a bit more systematically nationally may be helpful.

You are talking about buildings being built now, apartments and so on. Some of these are with historic planning applications that were granted a long time ago, so some thought and consideration around that might be sensible as well.

Chair: I think that brings to a conclusion the questions we have for you for the moment, so thank you all. We have had a lot of evidence from you there, which will be enormously helpful when it comes to formulating our report and recommendations. We should probably recognise that the thing we can take away from your evidence is the understanding that this is not just about roads, bricks and mortar; it has a very real impact for the people who are affected, and I am certain that that will have an impact on you and those who work with you as well. So thank you for your attendance and for the work that you and your teams do. It is not easy, I am sure, but it is appreciated.

We are now going to have a swift pause for a change of the dramatis personae. I think our next witnesses are ready to step forward, so I will not suspend proceedings, but we will just have a short pause.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Julie Foley OBE and Jaap Flikweert.

Q58 **Chair:** Julie and Jaap, welcome to the Committee. Again, just for the benefit of our records and for those who are following our proceedings, can I invite you to give a brief introduction as to who you are and what you do?

Julie Foley: Good morning. I am Julie Foley. I am one of the directors at the Environment Agency. I have responsibility specifically for oversight of our flood and coastal erosion risk management strategy—both the development and delivery of that strategy—and our work on flood risk mapping and modelling, on erosion mapping and modelling, and on shoreline management plans. I am also the director with oversight of the Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme that you have just heard about.

Jaap Flikweert: I am Jaap Flikweert. I am originally from the Netherlands, but I have lived in the UK for 21 years, so I am almost half-British. I am here to represent the regional flood and coastal committees. I am sure we will talk later about who we are and what we do. I am the coastal independent member on the Anglian Eastern RFCC. I am also a consultant in my day job and have been involved in lots of relevant studies, most of which Julie has already mentioned, so I hope to be able to bring some evidence from that work as well.

Chair: Thank you. Terry, you are going to do some questioning around the responsibilities of the organisations.

Q59 **Terry Jermy:** Thank you very much for your time today. Many years ago I was a member of the eastern regional flood and coastal committee, as a Norfolk county council representative. It was quite a while ago, in about 2013 or 2014, and I remember distinctly that they were still quite new and setting up. Maybe things have moved on since then, and I will be keen to find out how things have changed.

It would be useful if you could explain for the Committee a bit more about your organisation's role in supporting climate and weather resilience, particularly around coastal management and how that may have changed in recent years.

Jaap Flikweert: The RFCCs have a statutory role, defined in the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 and the associated regulations. We are partly composed of local elected members from the LLFA—the lead local flood authorities—and partly of independent experts like myself. There is always a coastal member on every RFCC.

I would say we have three roles. One is to scrutinise and approve the Environment Agency's regional investment programme for flood and coastal management. We also provide and decide about local levies, which is a small amount of money—maybe £40 million or so a year nationally—that supports the investment programme. The third purpose is knowledge exchange between the elected members and the professionals. That goes both ways: helping the elected members understand how flood and coastal management works, but also the professionals getting a local perspective.

Specifically, how does the RFCC support coastal management? One thing to say is that the elected members on the RFCC are not from coastal risk management authorities; they are from lead local authorities. That is maybe not ideal, so the formal approval process, you could argue, misses out on the elected members' voice from the district councils that are responsible for erosion management.

We try to work around that. Of course, the local members have their connections with the districts. Also, the independent members—particularly in my region—have tried to make sure there is a coastal voice among the independent members. So there is that element.

What do we do in practice? As part of those three roles of scrutiny, levy and knowledge exchange, we ensure that the coast features in the meetings and in the decisions in an appropriate way. The local levy is used, as it is for flood risk and for inland, partly also for coastal management purposes, typically to prime-fund schemes that are not ready for an application for grant in aid, for example. There is also a levy-funded post for community engagement. Again that works for all topics, not just on the coast. That is the sort of thing that the committee can do.

Julie Foley: The Environment Agency is the lead operational body for managing flooding from rivers and sea, but we also have a much wider role. Under the Flood and Water Management Act, we have the strategic overview role, which is an oversight of flooding from all sources: rivers, the sea and surface water, but also from coastal erosion. We were given that oversight role in the context of the coast to ensure that we join up all activities relating to coastal flooding, coastal erosion and risk management.

We do that through several ways. There are four key ways. The first is by setting the direction. We set the FCERM—the flood and coastal erosion risk management—strategy for the nation. That is a legal requirement. All risk management authorities, including coastal protection authorities and coastal authorities, are required to abide by that in their activities, as well as the Environment Agency, of course. That sets out our strategy not just for a few years, but looking out to 2100 and beyond, so it is a long-term strategy for the nation.

The second way in which we do it is by ensuring that practitioners and policymakers have good evidence of both current and future risk. That includes erosion risk. For example, we produce national coastal erosion risk maps and have recently updated that assessment. As you have just heard from colleagues on the other panel, that is showing us that we have some quite acute erosion risks in certain parts of the country at the moment. That information evidence comes from the Environment Agency's work in collaboration with coastal authorities.

The third area is through helping to set strategic plans. The coast for England and Wales is supported by shoreline management plans that I have heard referenced already. They are often referred to as world-leading plans. We help to set the requirements for the shoreline management plans and assure them, and they again set a direction of travel for managing every stretch of our shoreline, out to the end of the century and beyond.

The final, very important area is that, on the Government's behalf, we allocate and deliver funding for flood and coastal erosion risk management projects, whether led by the Environment Agency or by coastal authorities. We also have oversight over innovation programmes and learning programmes, and that includes the Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme.

Q60 **Terry Jermy:** Certainly, from my experience, taking the eastern region as a good example, dozens of councils are affected at county and district level. There is critical infrastructure, and I am thinking back to the north Norfolk coast and Sizewell in Suffolk. There are also lots of Government Departments, the Environment Agency and others. Lots of people were in the room every time there was an RFCC meeting. How effective is that relationship between the EA, which has a national role, and the regional flood and coastal committees? How effectively do they work together? I would be interested to ask you both and see if we get the same answer.

Jaap Flikweert: The RFCCs are regional. They are defined as being regional, so the main conversation between the RFCCs and the Environment Agency is at the regional level, talking about the regional investment programme and making sure that regional priorities are addressed. Of course, the strategy that Julie mentions is the national strategy, and everything follows through from that. At the more local level, with the shoreline management plans, for example, there are typically a few SMPs in an RFCC region, so that is why there is a closer interaction.

There is engagement at the national level, too, even though the RFCCs are local or regional. The chairs of the RFCCs and the coastal members of the RFCCs have a national forum where they come together. I would say there is a good connection with the Environment Agency in that sense as a key stakeholder that is asked for opinions and is heard and gives its opinions. That is where there is a route from the RFCCs to the national strategies.

Julie Foley: I agree. I think it is a really strong relationship. To go back a step, the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 created the regional flood and coastal committees and the Environment Agency were asked to create them through that Act. The chairs are appointed by Ministers, so they are independent of the Environment Agency, which gives them an independent, objective voice. RFCCs are made up of local elected members, who also provide a local democratic voice, as well as experts like Jaap, for example.

We are required to obtain consent for our investment programmes through the RFCCs at that regional level, and that then goes to the Environment Agency board for approval, but we cannot move forward our investment programmes without obtaining the consent of the regional flood and coastal committee. So there is a strong democratic voice that the RFCCs have always provided to flood and coastal erosion risk management that we do think is incredibly important in terms of that local ownership.

Q61 **Terry Jermy:** Do you think they are the right size? These areas that they cover are vast, and I distinctly remember, as a member for Norfolk, discussing coastal erosion and flooding in Essex, for example, which I had absolutely no knowledge about. Does it work being at a regional level, or could it be improved if it was slightly different?

Julie Foley: We can always debate boundaries, and there are going to be pros and cons. There are 12 RFCCs around the country. They broadly reflect water catchments, so there is a geographical logic to them. I think that we would agree they are the right boundaries for flood and coastal risk management in broad terms.

They also have rotating membership, so local elected members. I have worked with a lot of RFCCs in my time in the Environment Agency—a number of different ones—and they are different sizes according to the configuration of those geographies, but the local elected members will rotate often, to ensure that there is good representation of voice.

The powerful thing about them is that water transcends boundaries, which I know is a really obvious thing to say, but when you are only working with an individual local authority on a particular issue, it can be quite difficult when you have issues that need to be considered across a catchment or a coastal cell. Where we at the Environment Agency find that the RFCCs are really powerful is in being able to take a strategic approach across a water catchment, and combining resources and political support across several authorities can be quite a powerful convening role that the RFCCs have.

Jaap Flikweert: On the practicalities of how the scrutiny of the programme works, these programmes are very big. There are hundreds of projects, so scrutiny cannot be at the precise level of detail. That does not work with this scale, but I am not sure how much better it would work if you made it smaller. The Environment Agency's programme management teams do their best to put decisions at the right level to the committee, so if there are choices to be made about whether we do this or do that, then that is how it is put to the committee. I think that is working.

Q62 **Terry Jermy:** Julie, the top bosses of the EA were before this Committee a couple of weeks ago, and I think it is fair to say that as an organisation they have a complete list of different responsibilities and challenges in the role that the EA performs. Are there sufficient resources to look at flooding and coastal erosion specifically? I think you mentioned you have coastal experts. Are you being properly resourced? With all these other priorities that you have is flooding and coastal erosion taken seriously?

Julie Foley: It is taken very seriously by the Environment Agency. It is an incredibly important part of our role. Within my own teams, I am very fortunate to have a number of very deep subject matter experts who work on the details of national coastal erosion risk maps, who have had years and years of experience working with shoreline management plans, for example.

We have that nationally but also locally, which is incredibly important. I was formerly an area director in the Environment Agency, so I managed some of our local operations for the Kent coast. I had a coastal team locally, but I also had coastal engineers and experts who really understood their geographies, and who worked hand in hand with local authorities as well, which is incredibly important. The coast and all aspects of our flooding and coastal risk management, but coast in particular for this inquiry, is a really important feature of our work in the Environment Agency.

Q63 **Terry Jermy:** I am very pleased to hear that. Thank you. If I may, Jaap, some of the regional flood and coastal committees are quite focused on coastal erosion, and others are focused on flooding, for example . In your experience, is there the right split between coastal erosion experts versus flooding experts? Do you have the right resources to consider both the coastal aspect and the more inland flooding aspect?

Jaap Flikweert: In terms of the independent members, as I say, every committee has a coastal member, and I think that is working well. Those people will typically understand coastal flooding and coastal erosion and how that interacts. I would again make the point about the local elected members. They represent the lead local flood authorities, which unless they are unitary do not have a role in erosion management. There is a bit of a gap there.

Q64 **Terry Jermy:** It does vary. I am south-west Norfolk; I am about as far away from the coast as you can get in Norfolk, but we had a lot of lowland flooding issues, so it is good that there is a balance.

The local levy funding was always a bit of a dark art. I never quite understood how that all worked, to be honest. What proportion of the capital investment in the Anglia local levy is for coastal erosion versus other flooding? There is a huge list of priorities. Do you map how much goes towards coastal and how much goes towards flooding?

Jaap Flikweert: No, I would not say that is mapped in that way. I would also say that, in the current funding arrangement, the emphasis of the local levy has been—certainly for our committee—on property-level flood resilience and refurbishment, and there is quite a bit on prime-funding any scheme, which can be coastal schemes or other schemes. There is also a scheme to support innovative natural flood management. All those things have elements of erosion and elements of flooding, and we do not precisely map that out.

We are currently looking ahead at the funding changes and seeing where the priorities are there. There is probably potential to focus more on using local levy for adaptation, supporting coastal transition. That has not really been the case yet, but it is something that is being thought about.

Q65 **Terry Jermy:** Because there is that tension between whether you fund coastal erosion or flooding. There is always a constant list of projects and never enough money. Julie, do you want to add to that?

Julie Foley: I just want to add to support what Jaap is saying, that local levy is a local choice. The overwhelming majority of investment in flood and coastal erosion risk management comes from Government funding. There are contributions that can come from other sources—private sector sources, where there is a developer contribution or an infrastructure contribution of a particular project. One of the powerful features of RFCCs is that they have levy-raising powers, which it sounds like you are familiar with. However, that is completely a local choice. Those RFCCs have total discretion about how they spend that funding. It can go towards coastal erosion, it can go towards natural flood management, it can go towards property flood resilience. It can support staff and resources in local authorities as well. I think one of the nice features of that is that it is completely in the gift of that local discretion.

Chair: Thank you, Terry. We are going to move on to questions around strategic delivery of adaptation, with Josh.

Q66 **Josh Newbury:** Thanks again to you both for your time. In written evidence that has been sent to us a lot of coastal practitioners have clearly said that adaptation is not adequately resourced, and that was something echoed by our first panel, as you probably heard. We are told that that is undermining future coastal resilience across the country. What steps are your organisations—the Environment Agency and the regional flood and coastal committees—taking to support coastal adaptation?

Julie Foley: I would like to start with the shoreline management plans. Those are the way in which we undertake coastal adaptation and adapt to a changing climate. In many cases the Environment Agency gets invited by international bodies around the world to explain the shoreline management plans, because they are unique in that they cover every aspect of our shoreline; there is no gap. The shoreline management plans—all 20 of them for England—cover every aspect, and they set out the management approaches for not just the next 20 years, but the next 50 or 100 years, over epochs. They are very unusual in that they are adaptive plans; they are living plans. As our information on climate science gets better, as our erosion data gets better or changes, we can reflect that in those plans. They are in themselves adaptation plans.

Some very legitimate points have been made, and we have heard this as the Environment Agency over the years. We have put in a huge amount of effort with our coastal authorities to update these plans, so they are great plans. They have strong political governance in many cases, and they have huge commitment from authorities to work towards them. But they are not statutory in their status, which presents a real conundrum, I think, for our local partners in terms of making the case for resources to keep working on them so that they continue to stay up to date. That is a legitimate point that does need to be borne in mind.

Can I just share a statistic about why they are so important? Our national coast erosion risk maps were updated earlier this year, and they show that in the order of just under 4,000 properties are now at erosion risk. If the shoreline management plans are not implemented—as in they are not taken forward, the investments are not taken forward, they are not informing planning policy—that number increases ninefold. If you need evidence that the shoreline management plans are incredibly important for coastal erosion risk management, that statistic from our evidence shows why they are.

Another area that we think would help with the status of the shoreline management plans, and that would probably also help our local authority partners, is their status in planning. Local authorities do not need to have formal regard to shoreline management plans when they refresh their local plans. I should add that many of them do, notably some of the excellent councils you have just heard from—North Norfolk, East Riding and others—but it is not a requirement. That is a deficit in making sure that the shoreline management plans are hardwired into local planning so that we avoid inappropriate development in high coastal erosion risk areas.

That would also strengthen links with coastal change management areas. coastal change management areas are a designation in national planning policy, but as I think I heard just now, very few coastal authorities have designated coastal change management areas. That enables some restrictions to be placed on new development that could be regrettable into the future. The shoreline management plans provide excellent evidence for evidencing where a coastal change management area would be necessary, and if the links between shoreline management plans and spatial planning—town and country planning basically—were a lot clearer, those provisions could be significantly strengthened. They would help to strengthen the delivery of the shoreline management plans as our coastal adaptive plans.

I guess what I am saying is that, through the investment that the Environment Agency and our coastal authorities, academics and coastal groups have all put in for many years now, we have fit-for-purpose plans. The challenge is ensuring that we keep them up to date as the evidence changes so that they can be truly adaptive and that we hardwire them into other important planning decision making.

Q67 **Josh Newbury:** Briefly on that, do you think the hesitancy to designate CCMAs is more down to lack of resource at local authority level that we heard about earlier, or do you think it is about not wanting to put pressure on other parts of the local authority area in terms of housing numbers? What do you think sits behind that? Why are we not seeing more coming through at the moment?

Julie Foley: It might be all those things in practice. I think there is a point about having consistency in approach. If one authority decides to restrict development in an area of coastal erosion risk and another authority does not in another part of the country, that might create some inequalities of opportunity. But if it is becoming more acceptable to have coastal change management areas—they should only be applied where there are acute erosion risks, I should add, so they will not be needed everywhere, by any means—that would help to mainstream the understanding of them.

The fallback on that would be to use the shoreline management plans. If there was a requirement to have shoreline management plans given much more status when local plans are updated, then those things would naturally fall out as an evidence base to help support local elected Members, councillors and others with those conversations.

Q68 **Josh Newbury:** Yes, it is definitely something for us to look at as a recommendation in our report. That is quite a clear steer that could make a big difference in how those shoreline management plans are assessed in each area and the impacts they have in reality. Jaap, can I ask about coastal adaptation for RFCCs?

Jaap Flikweert: First, I would echo Julie about the importance and the strength of the shoreline management plans. I have worked on them myself a lot as well, but the RFCC also supports them, and would also argue that their continued use may need more support. It runs into the same issues that the local authority panel earlier talked about, in terms of resourcing. They are so important to set the scene. It is important to make them realistic, affordable and sustainable and do the right thing.

Your question, of course, was about adaptation and how that features in the overall picture. When you say adaptation, I think you mean transition or relocation and that sort of thing, and that is currently not eligible. The RFCC would certainly make the point that householders need support to get that planned approach that the local authorities talked about and for authorities not to fall back into an emergency response.

The lessons from CTAP and the other FCIP innovation programmes are that we do not want another set of experiments. What has been learned has to be mainstreamed, so all those housing options that Rob talked about—the erosion Re ideas that are being developed, the idea of planning and having documents that plan for transition and that help communities themselves plan for their own transition—can be done now on the innovation programme, but would need to be mainstreamed to embed them.

Q69 **Josh Newbury:** We are conscious that next year we are expecting the refreshed flood and coastal erosion risk management strategy. How important do you think that will be for building on this long-term commitment to adaptation?

Julie Foley: I led the Environment Agency's work to develop the original FCERM strategy, which was laid in Parliament in 2020. At the time that was quite a shift in our approach to flood and coastal risk management. For the first time, we embedded conversations about climate change, about adaptation and about the need for resilience, and that now has become common parlance across the sector.

We have been on quite a journey since then with a lot of partners. For the first time, we introduced in the strategy the concept of coastal transition, as Jaap has been referring to, and hence came the Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme, which we designed straight after that strategy. My reflection is that next year provides us an opportunity to refresh our thinking on this, because we now have several years of learning, which you have just heard all about, from the Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme. We need to make sure that that learning benefits other areas as well that are now at erosion risk.

We have just updated our understanding of flood and coastal erosion risk management and we know we have significant challenges as a nation to consider. Just on the flood risk side, we know that by the middle of the century, our national assessment of flood risk shows that one in four properties will be at risk of some type of flooding. We did not know that when we did the 2020 strategy. The evidence and the climate have been changing in front of us. It is definitely a reason to refresh the strategy.

The Government has also quite radically changed in a very positive way the funding framework for funding flood and coastal projects, and we need to reflect on that too. We are about to commence on the Government's behalf a new 10-year investment programme from April 2026. So this is a timely moment for us to update the national flood and coastal erosion risk management strategy.

I should just give you a reminder of what it is, because it often gets referred to as the Environment Agency strategy. I understand that, because the Environment Agency produces it, but we do that in collaboration with so many partners. We do it under that strategic overview hat I mentioned a bit earlier. It is there legally to align and steer the priorities of not just the Environment Agency, but every risk management authority—local authorities inland and on the coast, but also other risk management authorities, such as internal drainage boards, water companies and highways authorities, which all have a role in flood and coastal risk management. It is a very powerful tool for being able to refresh in light of the new evidence, and that is something that we will be keen to do.

Q70 **Josh Newbury:** Jaap mentioned the need to mainstream what we have already learned, and you referred to that as well, Julie. Do you think this refreshed strategy will be the way the EA will do that to embed that learning into national policy, or is that coming from several different angles?

Julie Foley: The strategy will definitely be one of the ways we will do it, but we are already actively working with our partners to make sure we are learning the lessons. I am conscious that the current Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme was designed by the Environment Agency—by my own teams in the Environment Agency—so we feel very passionately about the it. I am pleased it has been such an enormous success, which is thanks to the folk you have just heard from, in terms of the brilliant work of particularly East Riding and North Norfolk, but also the other councils in Cornwall and Dorset.

Our thinking now is, what is the next generation of that work, because we have coastal communities around the country at much earlier stages of community engagement, where there still may be a lot of denial or even lack of awareness of coastal erosion. They are at much earlier stages. Then you have places such as East Riding and North Norfolk that are in a much more mature state of their work on coastal adaptation, where they could start to pioneer some very interesting approaches to property purchase, for example.

Those are areas that we are very keen to explore and we are actively talking to DEFRA about that at the moment. We will need to secure ministerial support to be able to take forward the next generation of that programme. That is something that we are going to do in tandem. We will not be waiting for the strategy to work up those proposals.

Q71 **Josh Newbury:** It is great to hear about the work that is going on, particularly drawing on the latest scientific evidence and the political imperative that has come from the change in funding and the drive from Ministers.

Lastly, this is a bit more of a technical question. We have had quite a few submissions to the Committee that have told us that they consider adaptation operationally undeliverable because it cannot satisfy the properties better protected criteria under the FCERM strategy's grant in aid section. Could you clarify for us whether a relocated household is a better protected household in the light of that?

Jaap Flikweert: We would certainly say so.

Julie Foley: There have been some quite big changes with the incoming Government. There was an opportunity to refresh the current funding framework and rules for flood and coastal projects. That includes how we measure success, and there has been a long-standing metric, which I think many of your contributors to this inquiry referred to, which is around properties better protected. It has been there for years. There is nothing wrong with protecting properties, but it has been a very narrow metric. We are broadening that out—this will come into effect from April, with our new investment programme starting in April 2026—to better reflect not just properties at reduced risk, particularly from traditional flood and sea defences, but properties benefiting from maintaining the defences.

That is a very big deal on the coast, where I know there has been a legacy in many cases of underinvestment in maintaining coastal assets. There will be greater eligibility for that funding going forward, which is good news, but we will be able to factor that into our performance metrics, as well as for nature-based solutions, very importantly, both inland and on the coast, so that we can factor in wider resilience measures as well.

We will be shifting to a broader properties benefiting metric. That will also include properties benefiting from reduced erosion risk. It will not be that they are on an uneven footing. The new funding rules put on a level playing field all sources of flood risk and erosion risk.

Q72 **Josh Newbury:** Do you think, then, that that shifts the focus a little more to where the greatest benefit will be for every pound spent, rather than, as you said, a narrower definition that has led to funding going in one direction?

Julie Foley: For sure. I think several things have happened. We have had the shift in the funding rules, but we also now have these much better evidenced risk tools that I have just referred to—our national assessment of flood risk and the national coastal erosion risk maps. These have all just been updated, so they enable us to develop a pipeline of projects with local partners and our RFCCs to ensure that we target investment where the risks are greatest from a flood risk and erosion point of view. That inevitably means they will be the best value for money projects because that is where you will get the best benefits for properties, infrastructure, agriculture and all the wider beneficiaries you are aware of.

Jaap Flikweert: Just to be clear, as far as I know, but maybe that will come with further detail, the change in rules does not mean that relocation would be funded. That is a complicated issue, but what you are talking about is protection of properties and not moving houses. That would be a different change.

On the new funding rules, it is difficult to tell now, with what we know before it is implemented, precisely how that will play out—whether more or less will go to the coast or more or less will support communities that have to adapt to coastal erosion. I think we will have to see how that plays out when it gets implemented and when we see where the investment is going.

The third point I wanted to make is that refurbishment will be funded also for local authorities and for coastal erosion assets, so that is very good. However, ongoing maintenance still is something that is up to the local authorities to fund for themselves. One of the points that the RFCC has been making is that there needs to be a conversation with MHCLG as well about whether that is the right level. It is not ringfenced so there is always that going on, but is that the right level of support that local authorities are getting for ongoing maintenance of their coastal protection assets?

Chair: We are on the home straight now. We have some questions finally around the area of appraising coastal risks, and we are going to go back to Jenny Riddell-Carpenter for these.

Q73 **Jenny Riddell-Carpenter:** This is the final section, you will be glad to hear. There are a few things that we have been covering off that are particularly interesting. Before I dive into some of the questions around appraising coastal risk, could you give me your views on citizen monitoring and the evidence gathering that is happening in our communities, much like citizen testing for water pollution? In my constituency, a very well-organised group of residents in the Thorpeness area are mapping their own evidence building. They already share a lot of that data with the council, the council shares it back and vice versa. What is your view on that, particularly from an EA perspective? I would welcome a view from Jaap as well.

Julie Foley: We would really welcome hearing more about that. Particularly through the Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme but also with our wider innovation projects, we are encouraging of much more innovative approaches to community engagement, particularly when you are trying to engage communities on issues that are over a very long period. That can be difficult to do. What does it mean for your area looking out to the end of the century? That is a hard thing for most people to get their heads around, understandably. We have used several approaches around citizens' juries, for example, to think about adaptive approaches, and that is something that we would definitely encourage—much more engaging ways to involve local citizens, but also to empower them to be part of local choices. We definitely would welcome that.

The other thing we are trying to do is to communicate risk better. We have several digital tools on gov.uk. We would like them to be more widely used, because they are freely available so they do not cost anything. You can do a postcode search on "check your long-term flood risk". You can also check your erosion risk. It is the same thing: you can just put your postcode in, up pops a map and it shows your shoreline management plan for the area. It shows the erosion risk rates.

For the shoreline management plans, not least because we have put such considerable effort in to update them, we do not want them to sit on the shelf in a library or on somebody's computer file. We have put them on a tool called SMP Explorer, which is a digital visual map-based tool, so that anybody—not just a coastal practitioner but any citizen—can use that information to see what their erosion and flood risk options are and what the management actions are that ourselves and other authorities are taking along that stretch of the coastline.

We would like some of these digital tools to be more widely used by members of the public, because it will help to provide information and advice.

Q74 **Jenny Riddell-Carpenter:** We are going to come on to that, but I want to push you on the data gathering. One of the concerns that I have in my interactions with the EA, and I appreciate you are more of a strategic oversight, is that there is often a lack of urgency when I am directly engaging with the local EA around some of the issues that we are seeing on coastal erosion. Secondly, I have a concern—this has not happened yet—that residents would put forward their own monitoring and the EA would probably look at that, think it was not scrutinised enough or that it was not their data. What is your response to that? Is there a world where the EA could work better with local communities on their monitoring and evidence gathering? That is years-worth of data. In the case at Thorpeness, they have employed through their own funds an external agency to bring a lot of that data and evidence and a lot of the future plans to bear. I have a concern that the EA would look at that and say, "No, we need to do our own," or, "We need to go back to the drawing board," and would not adopt a sense of urgency with it.

Julie Foley: We are always going to want to look at information of that kind. We would never reject it in that way. By all means, I am happy to take that away for you and look into your local example. I am happy to do that.

When I talk about tools such as NaFRA—the national flood risk assessment—and NCERM, although they are convened by the

Environment Agency, the data and evidence comes from many local sources already. For surface water mapping, for example, all of that comes from local authorities, not the Environment Agency. For coastal erosion and other data, that has come from a network of regional monitoring programmes that are led by coastal bodies and other academia.

So we already use a huge amount of local information alongside the information the Environment Agency has nationally and locally, and we are always looking to get better at that. We are always keen to learn and always keen to make sure we can innovate in providing the best available data.

Q75 **Jenny Riddell-Carpenter:** Going back to what you were talking about a moment ago, sharing the information and making sure it is better communicated, we have been told that the conveyancing profession lacks understanding of coastal risks—this has come up time and time again—often leaving home buyers and would-be home buyers completely uninformed. In fact, in Thorpeness there is a home parallel to the coast—not rows back, but literally on the coast—that has just sold, I believe, for £200,000. You do not even necessarily need to go on a database. It blows my mind that anybody visited that property and thought that was a catch for them. How can the EA better communicate this risk to the sector, specifically the conveyancing sector, on house sales? How can you communicate better or work better with the sector more widely?

Julie Foley: I understand that frustration. We have also heard many examples where it is incredibly frustrating that you know there is a property at erosion risk, yet somehow it manages to change hands and the buyer does not ever seem to be told that it is at erosion risk. Even if you might think, "Well, that is obvious," they are not given information to make an informed choice. It is equally frustrating to us.

We have worked very hard to make all the data and information open book so anybody can see their erosion information and their projected rates. We would like more help ourselves from other parts of Government to have greater requirements on mortgage lenders, estate agents, other brokers to use some of that information. This is incredibly shortsighted. There has been some excellent engagement that Coastwise has done in North Norfolk with looking at how to engage with conveyancers and others, but that has all been very locally driven.

The Environment Agency's role is to make sure that our data is completely up to date and we use the best available information. Probably a frustration for us is that we would like it to be accounted for by mortgage lenders and other brokers. That is true of flood risk as well, so it is an issue not just in the erosion space but on flood risk matters more generally.

Q76 **Chair:** Sorry, Jenny, can I just cut in for a second here? If you buy a house in a former coalmine area, you will be able to go to a register and see that there is a risk of subsidence. If you buy a house in an area where there is naturally occurring radon, you will be able to find that. Why on earth has nobody ever done the same thing for coastal erosion?

Julie Foley: I think we are just as mystified, Chair, because the information is there. You do not have to pay for it, because you can get it on gov.uk.

Chair: This is surely a function of Government. We hold all these registers in the public interest and for very good reason. I give a full declaration of interest here. I was a solicitor a quarter of a century ago, but I did not do much conveyancing. I know that all these things are there, but not for coastal erosion. Flooding I can see might be a slightly different dynamic.

Julie Foley: I note my colleague referred just now that there is a live Government consultation going on at the moment on the search information for properties.

Chair: In the absence of doing anything useful, we can always have a consultation.

Julie Foley: That is a Government consultation, Chair. That is an opportunity for colleagues in MHCLG to have a look at this and ensure that that signposting is made more clearly.

Q77 **Jenny Riddell-Carpenter:** Which Department would have that responsibility?

Julie Foley: My understanding is it is MHCLG.

Q78 **Jenny Riddell-Carpenter:** If there was to be an open-source database for sales?

Julie Foley: In terms of setting requirements for property searches and to better account for erosion risk. That is a gap.

Q79 **Jenny Riddell-Carpenter:** Would you both agree—this was brought up in the earlier session—about the Flood Re principle, of having a coastal Re principle? I imagine you would both be in favour of that. Secondly, would an open-source database that sits alongside a coastal Re model be something you would both advocate for?

Jaap Flikweert: Yes, I would say so.

Julie Foley: That is obviously something for Government to consider, rather than the Environment Agency. An area we would welcome looking at is around strategic purchase of properties. As I said, that is very much a gap at the moment. There is not currently a national policy or approach to the long-term financing of properties that are at acute erosion risk. That is an area that, happily, the CTAP projects are starting to do some trials in, in Skipsea and Happisburgh notably, but they are very small scale. I think the ability to look at that in a more significant way, so that we can have a much clearer idea about what that financing approach should look like wherever you are in the country—and perhaps use the current East Riding and North Norfolk projects as test beds for that, because they are very much ready to do that—could set out a national approach that would be very welcome. That is a gap at the moment.

Q80 **Jenny Riddell-Carpenter:** We have one minute left. I have a very quick question, and hopefully we can have a quick yes or no answer, if possible. DEFRA is proposing to reform the FCERM capital investment programme so that all projects under £3 million are funded. Do you think the EA is sufficiently resourced to allow that fund to be allocated sufficiently within the prioritisation of that fund?

Julie Foley: Yes, because we have helped to develop the policy with DEFRA. It was largely on the Environment Agency's advice and our practical experience working with partners that we encourage projects that are smaller, so under £3 million, to be fully funded. That is to speed them up and get them to delivery a lot faster so that we can help communities a lot faster. It is great news that some of those smaller projects will now be eligible for funding. That is nature-based solutions, property flood resilience—it is the whole gamut of flood and coastal erosion risk management, and we are looking forward to delivering that from April.

Jaap Flikweert: The changes do not necessarily make implementation more labour intensive, so it does not in that sense have to add more resource.

I would just make the point that the smaller schemes, under £3 million, are rare on the coast, so that in itself does not necessarily help the coast, and one of the challenges, as we see how the programme pans out, is how that will work out for coastal projects.

Julie Foley: Just very quickly, because it is very relevant to your question and this inquiry, one of the other provisions that was made with the changing of the funding rules is that Government have set a number of strategic objectives. This is beyond value for money, which your colleague was just asking me about. It is about strategic priorities. One of those is around deprivation. When you look at properties at erosion risk currently, 60% of those are in the lowest deciles of deprivation, so the most disadvantaged areas. The fact that the Government have made deprivation a strategic priority will mean that through our prioritisation of our programme and how we balance our funding across the country, we will factor in the importance of coastal erosion and deprivation very explicitly. That is for sure a benefit that will help coastal communities, particularly from an erosion perspective.

Chair: We have concluded the questioning for today. We still have some way to go with our inquiry, though. You will understand that DEFRA is the Department that we are charged by Parliament to scrutinise, and DEFRA is a massive Department in terms of the range and nature of subjects that it covers, so we cannot go over every aspect of the Department's work in the minute detail that we might necessarily want. We must be selective, but I think this morning's evidence session has been enormously impactful and it has justified, I think, the suggestion from Jenny and others on the Committee that this was a necessary and appropriate subject for the Committee to investigate. You will hear further from us. There will be a report in due course, and it will be very much informed by the evidence that we heard from yourselves and the earlier panel. For the moment, with our gratitude, I will conclude the session.