



Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Winter Floods](#), HC 991

Wednesday 22 January 2014

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Members present: Miss Anne McIntosh (Chair); Richard Drax, Jim Fitzpatrick, Mrs Mary Glendon, Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck, Iain McKenzie, Sheryll Murray, Neil Parish, Ms Margaret Ritchie, Mr Mark Spencer, Roger Williams

Questions [1-XXX]

Witnesses: **Dan Rogerson MP**, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, **Paul Leinster**, Environment Agency and **Cllr Mike Jones**, Local Government Association, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Good afternoon and welcome. Thank you very much indeed for joining us to talk about the ongoing winter flood situation. If I could just ask each of you for the record to introduce yourselves and give your positions.

Cllr Jones: Thank you. I am Mike Jones. I am Leader of Cheshire West and Chester Council. I am also Chairman of the Environment and Housing Board of the Local Government Association, which includes flooding as part of its portfolio.

Dan Rogerson: Dan Rogerson. I am Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at Defra and Minister for Flooding, so the title on the television screen says, amongst other things.

Paul Leinster: Paul Leinster, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency.

Q2 Chair: You are all very welcome. A particular welcome to our former colleague on this Committee. Can I first just record our thanks for the work that the emergency services and those represented here today did and are continuing to do? We have also, just for the record, been contacted by a large number of organisations and individuals; we will probably publish for the record what they have suggested. To be absolutely clear in our understanding, if I could first focus on the Environment Agency and Government input, and be absolutely clear on the breakdown—we will go into this in more detail—between the revenue side, the maintenance side of spending, and what the capital expenditure is.

It has been put to me by my colleagues who represent Somerset Levels, and this is your opportunity to either agree with this or disagree, that because the regular channels that would

take the water off the Levels and allow the water to recede from, in particular, the village Muchelney, because the regular maintenance has not been done, that has contributed to this particular flooding episode. I do not know which one of you would like to go first. Mr Leinster, would you, or the Minister?

Dan Rogerson: Would you like me to talk about the Levels in particular first?

Chair: And this breakdown between revenue and capital, for our better understanding.

Dan Rogerson: The Government is very aware of the fact that we need to invest significantly in flood defences to ensure that we are protecting property and people, and to protect the local economies from the damage that flooding causes. It also causes huge emotional turmoil and upset to individuals, families and businesses when this happens as well. Given the events that have happened over recent weeks, I would like to take this opportunity to put on record my thoughts and those of colleagues, which are with all those people who have been affected. I would echo your comments, Madam Chairman, on the huge efforts that were made by Agency colleagues, but also local government colleagues and the emergency services, as well as local volunteers, in dealing with the issues. Government has invested £2.3 billion across flood defences in the current Spending Review period.

Q3 Chair: Could I just pause there? Is that on physical projects as opposed to maintenance? That is on physical flood defences.

Dan Rogerson: That is on the total budget. We could talk also about partnership funding, which is maybe something you want to come back on as well, and explore a little bit in detail.

Q4 Chair: For example, how much has been allocated out of that £2.3 billion for defences that may be in need of repair after this and other episodes?

Dan Rogerson: I may hand over to Paul Leinster here to talk about the specifics about the damage and what we are picking up, because Agency colleagues are out there and have been assessing that damage with regard to the east coast event that happened in early December. We have since then had fluvial flooding, groundwater events and further coastal flooding over the Christmas and new-year period. Some of that work, because rivers are still high, is in progress, but Mr Leinster will be able to give some perspective on the assessment of that damage.

Paul Leinster: Thank you. We are currently still assessing the level of funding required to repair both the damage that happened during the early December surge, because that did affect the west coast as well as the east coast, and also then the flooding that primarily impacted on the south-west and the south of the country through the new-year period. We are looking at that money, we are identifying the need and we are having discussions with Defra colleagues about that. We also know that they are having conversations with Treasury about that.

We have carried on with our repair work. One of the things that we were concerned about was that we got the flood risk management assets up again to a condition where they would withstand the tides that came in early January and then further high tides, which

will come in February, and so we have been pressing on with that emergency repair work. What we will then need to do is make sure we have a programme of work that will go through the following year to make sure that all of those assets are repaired.

Q5 Chair: Do you recognise something that you said in an interview, Mr Leinster? You said, “Flood risk maintenance will be further impacted...All of our work on mapping and modelling and new developments in things like flood warning will also have to be resized. And we’re looking at a proportionate reduction in the number of people in flood risk management”. What I am trying to establish is how much of the money is going to go on physical infrastructure, which is important—no one would disagree—but you do need to maintain the same physical infrastructures, as well as doing the dredging and maintenance of the main channels.

Paul Leinster: Yes, I do recognise those words and, as you say, there are two broad categories of expenditure. There is the capital, and we know what the plan is for that capital. We also know that, over this Spending Review period, our revenue budget has been reducing. We have been looking at how we can deliver greater efficiency, how we can carry out those tasks in different ways, to maximise the outcomes that we are delivering with the available funding. That is true with all public bodies and with councils. Everybody in the public sector is facing reducing funding and we are managing that. That will have an impact in some of those areas that you, Chair, have mentioned, and it will reduce the number of staff that we are able to afford.

Q6 Chair: Against that backdrop, what is your overall assessment of the capability of the existing flood defences and the flood response agencies since the extreme weather events started, as you mentioned, in early December?

Paul Leinster: Also as I said, and is on the record, through the reorganisation that we will be going through, we will still be able to maintain the level of flood incident response that we have shown. One of the things on record is that we had, over both the Christmas and new-year periods, fully staffed-up rotas, and we have had people on rotas throughout this whole period. Through any reductions in funding, one of the things that we have been looking at very carefully—and we have had challenge from our board about this—is making sure that any of the new arrangements will enable us to have the proper level of incident response. We believe we will be able to do that. In addition to that, we have also said that, through the organisational change that we will go through, we will seek to protect frontline services. We might have to do that in different ways, but that is what we are looking to do.

Dan Rogerson: I have obviously had the opportunity to visit Agency staff on the ground, as I said, who have worked very hard. I recognise that it is a challenge for them to meet the demands that we as a society are placing on them with the resource that is available to us in Government, given that we are where we are with national finances and dealing with the deficit. However, what I saw there are staff who work in other aspects of the Agency’s work who are supporting Agency colleagues who are the frontline flood responders. Also, for example, when the east coast flood was on before December, staff came from the west to support colleagues there. The Agency is responding very flexibly to that and is clearly prioritising these jobs.

Q7 Chair: I am delighted that we had the opportunity to see one of the operations in our visit to Yorkshire. Councillor Jones, could I ask you the same question about how you think local government councils are positioned to respond? Could you tell the Committee how much of the money that you get from Defra is ring-fenced and guaranteed to be used for flood incidents?

Cllr Jones: In terms of the money that we receive, if it is for flood defences, then it will be used for flood defences. We put a contribution in towards that. I am aware that there is about £148 million being contributed by both local government and the private sector. I think it is £40 million from the private sector and £110 million from local government, and that is a proportion that is agreed through the business cases that are developed for flood defences.

Q8 Chair: And from grant-in-aid and the money from Defra? There is a little bit of an allegation that perhaps the councils are not using all the money that is allocated to flood spending that they should be doing, but they are using it for other purposes. Can you refute that?

Cllr Jones: I am not aware of that, but I am aware that many councils are putting more money into flood defences. Somerset County Council, for example, has offered £800,000 for comprehensive dredging of the Rivers Parrett and Tone, as an example, and they have put further monies in for local flood prevention schemes. I do not think we treat money as ring-fenced entirely; it is on a need basis. Certainly councils do put extra money in.

Q9 Sheryll Murray: First, Minister, I am really grateful that you visited Looe in my constituency in the aftermath of the horrendous flooding. Obviously there is capital money available. Would some of that capital money be able to be used to provide a flood defence scheme against the coastal flooding that Looe suffered from?

Secondly, with regard to the clean-up operation, is there anything that has been done or your Department can do to work with DCLG—I would like to hear Mr Jones' view on this as well—to put right the gross injustice that seems to be happening to councils such as Cornwall over the Belwin formula? Cornwall, as you know as a fellow Cornish MP, loses out quite considerably to this.

Finally, and it is all linked to response again, I was quite surprised to hear a local councillor blaming the Environment Agency for the lack of distribution of sandbags in my constituency on a visit to Looe the previous afternoon to when you came. When I asked the Environment Agency, I understood local councils are still able to provide sandbags to prevent flooding. Could you just confirm that this is the case, please?

Dan Rogerson: Madam Chairman, I echo Mrs Murray's comments about the community in Looe and how resilient they are. They, as a coastal community, over centuries have had to deal with episodes like this, but there were very high tides. They were rolling up their shirt sleeves and getting on with it, but they obviously deserve the same level of support that other communities get. As with anywhere else, a business case that comes forward for the cost-effectiveness of a flood defence scheme, which I know is being developed with the community there, would be assessed and would be open to funding in the same way that others are.

One thing that I also welcomed there and in other places that I visited is the attitude local authorities are taking towards their economic development, using flood defences, through the partnership funding formula, as Councillor Jones has said, to look at other opportunities. In one place it was about protecting sandy beaches or recreating them—not in Looe; that was on the east coast over in Essex—to stimulate tourism in a seaside town, which perhaps had seen a bit of a decline in tourism. In Looe, we heard how they may want to provide more moorings for visiting boats and also to allow the visiting fleet to stay in Looe when the weather is getting bad and not for the larger boats to have to head off to Plymouth. They are looking at the economic impacts, partnering that up with that need to protect residential property as well. That is the right approach. It will allow us to unlock funding through that partnership approach, as Councillor Jones has said.

With regard to the specific point about sandbags, obviously the Environment Agency has responsibilities on the ground in some river catchments and some coastal areas, with some of the infrastructure that is there that the Agency has responsibility for. Through the resilience planning that goes on, local authorities will usually make provision to provide things there. Of course, local residents as well, having been given warning and knowing that they are in areas that are prone to flooding, will quite often have precautions and have some facilities. We provide resources from Government through local authorities for property-level protection, so that people can be prepared. Again, we saw some good examples of that in Looe on the Saturday that we visited in the new year.

Sheryll Murray: And Belwin?

Dan Rogerson: On the Belwin formula, it is obviously a matter for the Communities and Local Government Department, but obviously we have had discussions about that. I know discussions were had with Councillor Jones; there are issues there that he will be raising with colleagues at CLG about how that works. Of course, if there is anything I can do to support on evidence and making sure that those discussions proceed, I would be happy to do so.

Cllr Jones: From our point of view, Chairman, I was involved in a telephone conversation with CLG, DfT and Defra, where they clearly are working well together in terms of planning the recovery from the floods. It is very welcome that £6.7 million has been made available, with hopefully a very streamlined system to enable councils and communities to apply for that money to get it into the ground to aid that recovery. There is a sense of urgency about the high tides that are expected in February, particularly where coastal sites have been severely damaged.

I have to say I will express significant disappointment that the LGA was not involved in the COBRA meetings earlier on. I think that was a mistake by Government Departments and I think we should be there at the table, because we are the ones delivering on the ground. That is my point on that.

In terms of the Belwin formula, we think that is not fit for purpose; it is out of date. It is perverse. Cornwall and my own council are good examples, where district councils with small budgets—0.2% is a very small number before help is able to be given by Government under that formula. For a large council like ourselves, a unitary now, and Cornwall in particular, which is even larger, we have to spend quite a bit.

Sheryll Murray: £1.4 million.

Cllr Jones: It is 1.4 million for Cornwall. I think ours is £800,000 before we can get help. That seems very perverse. I have not got any evidence for this, but it could also attract the wrong behaviours, because a county council could turn around and say, “Why should we help? Let the district councils do all the work, because they can claim the most money back.” Therefore, county councils would not participate. There are some real issues about the way that the revenue side of Belwin operates.

On the capital side, I have some very serious concerns as well. We have one issue, for example in Allerdale, where the coastal erosion went five metres into the coastline and actually exposed what appeared to be a contaminated waste tip that was closed in the early 1960s. I was speaking to the Member earlier today about this. The cost of the coastal protection is significant and, for a small district council, 50% of a very big number is enough to floor a district council in these very difficult financial times for councils. I have very serious concerns about the way the capital side operates as well, and I think there are opportunities, perhaps if we work with Government, to develop a better scheme that provides better, in inverted commas, insurance cover between councils and Government that will deliver better solutions for councils and communities—most importantly communities.

In terms of sandbags, I have to say the warning systems that the EA and the Met Office put out in November, December and January were excellent. They were accurate and certainly the tidal surge that we saw in December was absolutely spot on in terms of the levels it reached, certainly around the Dee Estuary, which I am familiar with. It was slightly higher than what actually happened by a few inches, thankfully, in January, but I think that those warnings allowed councils to be very proactive, to distribute sandbags, work with communities, enable the resilience teams to get up and running, and put all our emergency procedures in place, which we do a lot of the planning and exercising for.

That itself proactively enabled a better service to communities, and particularly the old and vulnerable. When you are dealing with elderly people and moving them out of their house because it might be flooded, to do it in a rush is actually quite a difficult experience for an elderly person, a vulnerable person. If you can do it a few days beforehand, talk to them, help them out, move them slowly and move their possessions upstairs, you are working with the elderly people in a much more caring way, which is much more in line with what you want to do. The warning systems that the EA invoked over the last few months have been excellent and much appreciated by councils across the country.

Q10 Chair: Could you just answer the point on sandbags, because it was my specific understanding that the district councils were always responsible for issuing sandbags? I heard reports, and I do not think it was Mrs Murray’s constituency, that people were being told to fill and provide their own sandbags. The Committee would like to know how we got to that situation, when Sir Michael Pitt said that that was one of the responsibilities that district councils should play.

Cllr Jones: I see that as the responsibility of councils to facilitate that happening. Clearly you will get residents to help fill them, because of the transportation of sand and things, but the logistics of that will be down to councils. I do not know of any instances where that has not happened.

Q11 Sheryll Murray: This was the portfolio holder for the council, who had told a local business that the responsibility lay with the Environment Agency. The council do have on their website that they issue sandbags. They knew this flooding was going to take place because of the tides, but they did not actually distribute any.

Cllr Jones: That sounds like an individual officer has not done what the council should be doing.

Q12 Chair: Could you possibly write to the Committee and tell us what the general practice is amongst district councils? I know anecdotally in my own area when it has happened, people's homes can be protected if a sandbag is issued in time from getting the nasties coming up.

Cllr Jones: We can certainly do that, Chairman. We will certainly go round, check with the councils and see what their practices are. We will write to you on that basis.

Dan Rogerson: What we see, particularly in communities that can get slightly more isolated during some of these events, is that you find a range of plans in place. If they do not work in some places, there is obviously something that needs to be addressed locally. In some cases, it may be a town or parish council that is involved in this because of the location, and the principal authority will be involved.

Q13 Mrs Lewell-Buck: My question is just to the Minister. Obviously you will be aware that the Pitt review undertaken by the last Labour Government recommended a statutory duty was placed on the Fire and Rescue Services to deal with flooding events and help alleviate the current confusion between services. That is supported by the Fire Brigades Union. I was just wondering whether the Minister has had any discussions with his colleagues in DCLG about taking that forward.

Dan Rogerson: Obviously during the recent events I have been revisiting the Pitt recommendations to see what has been implemented and what has not. In the months I have been in office reflecting on them, we have implemented 44 fully. There are 40, Madam Chairman, where they are implemented and there is ongoing work. There are some, such as around the issue of drainage, which you are very much interested in, which we may well return to, I anticipate—

Chair: You will not be disappointed.

Dan Rogerson: We are taking those forward at the moment. With regard to Fire and Rescue Services involvement in this, they are very strongly represented in all the local organisations that tackle these issues. We have seen also, throughout COBRA, that the adviser to the Communities and Local Government Department on fire and rescue was involved in those meetings. High-volume pumps were moved around, for example, between local authority areas. One of the constant questions through to the gold command was: do you have the equipment that you need? Can we provide more? The message was coming back, if they needed anything more. I was very impressed with the way that colleagues moved those resources around, and I think Mr Leinster would echo the support we have had from local government more widely, but also the Fire and Rescue Services, has been really important in that.

Q14 Mrs Lewell-Buck: In terms of pace and statutory duty, though, is that something that you plan to take forward or not?

Dan Rogerson: What we would have to do, as part of the evaluation of what has happened with these flood defences, is see if there are any issues that we need to take forward, but certainly the response that we had from Fire and Rescue Services, across the country where it was needed, was very strong. The arrangements seem to be working quite well.

Q15 Iain McKenzie: I will be brief. It is just a bit of clarification. I think I picked up earlier that you intimated that the repair of flood defences would take a year. I was just wondering if that was intimated that it would be within 2014, or is that a year commencing from the end of the evaluation process of the damage?

Paul Leinster: We have prioritised the repair that is required of all the defences. Those defences that are providing protection to people, to property and, in one case in particular in the north-east, to an industrial process are being prioritised to make sure that the level of defence that is provided by them is back up to the required level. What we will do and make sure is that, if there are any questions about those defences, then we will, during any event, make sure that we will visit them more frequently. In some areas, we will actually change the flood-warning approach that we take for those areas. We still do not yet have the full programme of work, so I cannot answer straight the question, which is: how long is it going to take us to recover all of the assets?

Q16 Iain McKenzie: The areas that you have prioritised, they will be concluded within—

Paul Leinster: They are done. There are some places where there were actual breaches or significant impacts, if you take some of the shingle ridges, which were down in places like Weymouth. We had people out between the tides repairing those. An adequate level of protection has been brought back to all of those places. It takes a longer time to get those assets right back to the design condition that we would like them to be back in, but it is prioritised and they will provide the level of protection that is required.

Q17 Ms Ritchie: These are questions that are building on previous responses around the issue of robustness and resilience in respect of flood defence systems. What contingency plans do flood response agencies, such as the Environment Agency and local authorities, have in place for emergency situations, and were emergency plans successfully implemented over the Christmas period following a month of reflection?

Paul Leinster: If I lead on that, we have been in a state of readiness in terms of our flood incident response since the beginning of December because, at that time, we had both the west and east coast surges, so we had to be prepared for that. We have got highly developed emergency plans that we put into place. We have a national incident room. Before the Christmas period and the period after Christmas through the new year that national incident room was open for 20 days. For some of those, it was open on a 24/7 basis. Each of our areas that is responding to a flood event also has an area incident room. We have regular meetings that we call between those different levels, and we co-ordinate our response.

Before an event happens, we put our crews out to make sure that any blockages are cleared, that screens are cleared and that gates are shut, and we make sure that the flood

defences are in the right state. Then, as the event unfolds, we continue to do that work. We had our rotas fully staffed up over Christmas and new year. I in fact went and visited a couple of the incident rooms between Christmas and new year to thank the staff for the sterling work that they were doing. That was the second year running that I had been back to those places because, you will remember, back in 2012 we also had significant flooding and the Environment Agency was responding during all of that as well.

One of the key phrases that we now use in the Environment Agency is “think big, act early” for all of these events, and “always expect the unexpected”. We make sure that that is how we ramp up our response work.

Dan Rogerson: From our perspective, it is through the regular meetings of COBRA, which we had throughout the winter period, ensuring that Government Departments are working together with agencies and the sector bodies that they liaise with. Obviously it was important to have representation there from the Department for Transport, from DECC and from CLG in particular, which was liaising with colleagues. I do take on board the position that Councillor Jones has outlined in terms of the LGA presence at COBRA, which I understand has happened occasionally in the past for some circumstances. Certainly CLG was very much liaising directly with local authorities, and that is a suggestion there that we could take forward.

We very much welcome the work that has been done by the Flood Forecasting Centre, which takes colleagues from the Agency background, with their understanding of how the impacts are felt on the ground, with Met Office and forecasting colleagues to bring them together to look at the impacts. As we have heard, that was very much crucial to allowing the agencies and the people on the ground to have the information at their fingertips to be able to deal with the response.

Then it is about looking if there is any resource that we need to add from Government, on a day-by-day basis, to deal with any particular surges in demand, whether in supporting transport infrastructure or supporting those colleagues who are dealing with the flood events themselves. As I said, they are things like high-volume pumps, boats to enable rescue and ensuring that those resources are available. I very much welcome the way in which all the agencies ensured that there was that flow of information to us here centrally as well to be able to co-ordinate those resources.

Cllr Jones: Councils are very well aware of their responsibilities under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, and they do often maintain and exercise multi-agency incident management command structures, which include responses to floods. They manage through a risk-based-type system, by looking at what the issues are, to ensure that adequate resources are deployed, because clearly every incident is very different and the same incident will impact on councils in different ways as well, so there has to be that flexibility.

Certainly when I have been in incident rooms, we work very well with our partners, particularly the Environment Agency and, if I dare mention it, utilities as well. Although they are category two responders, they do understand their duty to co-operate and the provision of information. Of course, they are involved in planning exercises, and we do not see any barriers that exist between the partners. I have certainly not seen any and none

have been reported to us, of any issues, unless it is obviously a character issue between two individuals. Broadly, as far as I am aware, that works incredibly well.

There is also a lot of work done by councils in terms of raising awareness of community resilience and community emergency plans. I do know a lot of councils are working with particularly isolated communities to ensure that they have a lot of self-help in place. Particularly in our very rural areas and exposed areas, it is really important, because sometimes, particularly with snow as a good example, you cannot get to them unless you have a helicopter. You cannot even do that when it is snowing. Cornwall is a very good example of that, and so is the Lake District and round there, so we do have to build strength into our resilience plans with communities as well, in terms of self-help. That has certainly worked as far as I am aware, with many community groups working to support communities.

I do know that Minister Brandon Lewis is speaking to them to see what they can learn from those experiences as well, in terms of community organisations and some of the great work they did, even in the recovery phase raising money to support those communities as well, in terms of aiding their recovery.

Q18 Ms Ritchie: Then a further question to you, Councillor Jones: how much reliance has been placed on mutual aid agreements to enable local authorities to access additional resources and assistance during the recent events?

Cllr Jones: I am aware that a lot of councils have agreements in place between councils. I am not sure of the level of how much they have been enacted. Certainly where you saw major flooding, particularly down in the south, you saw multiple agreements; there are probably agreements between them all dealing with their own issues. I am not aware of resources coming from, say, the north of England to the south of England to support that. I am not aware of that detail, but I can certainly enquire with councils to see whether that happened. I just do not know the answer to that.

Q19 Ms Ritchie: Can you come back to us in writing through the Chair with your assessment and actual details?

Cllr Jones: I will do that, yes.

Q20 Ms Ritchie: A further question to the Minister first. Could the responses by the various organisations involved have been better co-ordinated over the holiday period? Were there fewer people available to respond to flooding events over the holiday period, having had all the information and now having assessed the situation? What do you think?

Dan Rogerson: There is a lessons-learned exercise, which is being led by the Minister of State at the Cabinet Office who leads on Government policy, which will look in detail at some of these. Anecdotally, I would say the message that we have had back is that agencies co-operated very well together. The plans that were put in place were fulfilled and delivered effectively, going back to December where we saw evacuation of people in areas that thankfully did not flood. Those evacuations took place as a precautionary measure and proceeded quite well.

Over particularly the Christmas and new-year period, if there are examples of where occasionally some local authorities did not have communications in place and people were

trying to contact people, we will look at the evidence there. What I would like to reflect on is, first of all, how these plans, the defences that were put in place and the work of the agencies, local and national, protected hundreds of thousands of properties and the people who live in them. The vast majority of those local authorities provided a very good on-the-ground service to complement the work the Agency does in maintaining the defences and making sure that the warnings were there for everybody. We will look in detail as that work on the lessons learned proceeds to see what things, as after every event, we can take forward to do even better on any further occasion.

Q21 Ms Ritchie: How long do you estimate that that work will take in relation to lessons learned and will it be possible for the Committee to have a copy of that?

Dan Rogerson: Absolutely. I think the work that goes on from that that leads to outputs I am sure we would be able to share but, as I say, it is a matter for the Minister in the Cabinet Office who will be taking that forward. Defra will play its full role in contributing the information we have, and reflecting on the assets and the systems for which we are responsible, to make sure we play a role in that. I know that colleagues in CLG will be doing the same, and in Transport, DECC and so on. It will be a Cabinet Office lead on that.

Q22 Chair: We understood that this is your own flooding report. Defra is doing its own flooding report that is due at the end of this month. Is that on track?

Dan Rogerson: Absolutely. As Mr Leinster was saying earlier, in terms of what we need to do to put assets back to the state that we would seek to see them in, in terms of protecting communities for future events, that is clearly a matter for Defra and the Agency advising on what works need to happen and what the budget would need to be, so that then we can evaluate, in Defra's current budget in the current financial year, what we are able to fund or if we need to ask Treasury for extra resources. The Prime Minister has asked our Secretary of State to report in the next few weeks on that. This lessons learned goes much more widely than that about the systems and processes to ensure that, if there are any decision things or lines of communication that we could improve, we reflect on that as well. Our report will very much focus on what we need to do in terms of maintenance and getting those capabilities back to the state for any future events.

Q23 Richard Drax: Can I put on the record thanks to the Environment Agency on behalf of South Dorset and the Minister for the good work they did and the Minister coming down so quickly after we were hit by a rising tide? Can I just make an observation or ask a question really? That is, being a former soldier, the failure or success of an incident control point or control room—call it what you will—depends on who was in that room, i.e. you could turn immediately to your left and there was a policeman, a member of the fire service and a member of the council. Colleagues around this room and others have said, “We could not get sandbags. We could not get this.” In my constituency, I hope I am accurate in saying, the sandbags were available, but you had to get them yourself. It would be nice to have a gentleman in a lorry perhaps to deliver to people who are in dire need. This just shows perhaps a slight lack of co-ordination, although the effort and the will were there. Is there any evidence that, in your travels, that was the case? Perhaps that could be improved.

Secondly, I am slightly surprised about the armed services; this was a wonderful opportunity for them, I would have thought, to get involved in this and help, but they did not. Can you explain why?

Dan Rogerson: There was an example in Kent where the army did step in and assist with sandbagging and filling in sandbags. The Ministry of Defence made it clear that resources were there should they be required and they were involved in the COBRA discussions as well. The feedback that we had from most local authorities was that the plans were being implemented effectively. As I say, through the lessons learned, if there are particular examples that Members here have shared, and there may be others that you received in evidence, which clearly we would very much like to see as part of that process, we will look at them. I know that the local authorities concerned—and I am sure Councillor Jones will want to comment—will want to take them forward and improve on that.

The Environment Agency has its incident rooms, looking particularly at things like river levels and coastal flooding levels, using the data that they have for the assets that they have deployed around the country. Then there are the gold commands that have operational response more widely, if it involves protection of infrastructure, evacuation of people and so on. Chief Constables would be the lead figures in all of those. We have learned a great deal in terms of how these things are co-ordinated. If there are efforts that we could make to improve them further, obviously we are keen to do so. I would say that, from the feedback that we have had, again anecdotally, in the vast majority of circumstance those resources were there and people were supported. If there are examples where there were failures, then we need to address that.

Cllr Jones: I would add that in Essex additional support was provided by the military personnel from the Colchester Garrison as well. They were called on by the council, so I do know, where councils have very good relationships with the military and where they are available, because clearly a lot of them are on deployment as well, they were called on where required.

Dan Rogerson: I should also mention in response that I know that the Royal Marines assisted in Mrs Murray's constituency with moving some cars for the community. I think it was Calstock that was cut off by landslip, and so they were able to get back to work and get the children to school.

Sheryll Murray: They liberated the cars from a stranded area.

Dan Rogerson: That assistance was made available. We are very grateful for the contribution that has been made.

Chair: Jim Fitzpatrick wanted to go over an earlier point before you come on to the funding.

Q24 Jim Fitzpatrick: I will just roll them both together, Chair, if I may. Can I just start with Councillor Jones? You made comments about the LGA not being present at COBRA, which obviously you would not have said if it had not been significant. The Minister clearly made noises to say that he recognised the point. Were the communications from the representatives from CLG not adequate then? You felt that they could have been better had you been seated at the table.

Cllr Jones: I am not aware of what the communications were and I think they were done on an individual-council basis. That is a bit disappointing because, with the LGA, there is a resource there of staff who can actually help man and co-ordinate between councils, rather than it just being left to one Department or another Department in Government. If we are truly about working together and helping communities, then we should be a partnership and we should be at the table. For example, I was personally invited to join the ash dieback COBRA meetings. I could not actually make them, so somebody else from the LGA went. The feedback I received was it was a very worthwhile contribution, so it demonstrates that actually it is a positive way of moving forward. If we do promote amongst our emergency services and all the other organisers, whether they are military or not, partnership working, working together and not having barriers between us, then we should be deploying the same sense of attitude at Government and LGA levels, in my view.

Q25 Jim Fitzpatrick: Thank you. That makes absolute sense, and clearly the Minister has some sympathy with your view. Minister, can I ask you how Defra will ensure that its ability to respond to flood emergencies will not be impaired by departmental budget reductions?

Dan Rogerson: I have already set out and we have set out at length the investment that we are making of £2.3 billion, plus £148 million, as Councillor Jones said, partnership funding in terms of the defences. As Mr Leinster has said, the Agency is facing the need to make efficiencies in the budget that they get from Defra, although we have made sure that there is an above-inflation increase in the current financial year of £5 million in the maintenance budget. We work very closely with the Agency to ensure that we protect the frontline services, and Mr Leinster has a challenge, as we all do, dealing with the financial situation across Government to make sure that we get absolute best value for money and efficiency.

The Agency has been very effective in getting more efficiencies in the money that is spent, so they have improved the efficiencies for delivering those budgets. There will be now a number of discussions about how the restructuring moves forward, but we have been absolutely clear and I want to be clear today, as Mr Leinster has been, that this is a priority area for the Agency. Huge gains and progress have been made in providing for better flood responses since some of the events that happened a number of years ago; we want to maintain those gains and ensure that communities have that protection that they need.

Q26 Jim Fitzpatrick: Forgive me if I did not pick it up and if you mentioned a figure earlier, but do you have an estimated cost for how much it will be to restore the flood defences to the integrity they were at before December?

Dan Rogerson: It is about £30 million we are talking about for some of those bits of infrastructure but, as I say, given the recent flooding events, particularly river flooding events, there are some catchments that obviously have not returned to normal, so there will be assessment work that will need to be taken on those. That will feed into the statement that the Secretary of State for Defra will make in the next few weeks to Parliament, as the Prime Minister has asked him to do.

Q27 Jim Fitzpatrick: That is money that will come from contingency funding or is there any budget for it?

Dan Rogerson: Some of that work will be able to be funded within the current financial year. Obviously some projects will be longer term to get that work because, as Mr Leinster has said, some of the work will take longer to do. The Agency will be getting on with it as soon as possible. We will be in a discussion with Treasury if we feel that we need extra money to achieve the results that we want to see to get those defences back up to the correct standard.

Q28 Jim Fitzpatrick: My final question, Chair, is that yesterday the Climate Change Committee published a report that said, in summary, that spending this period is £0.5 billion behind the amount needed to avoid increasing flood risk, which could lead to an additional £3 billion in future flood damages, which might be expected. It is very early—the report was only published yesterday—so forgive me for asking the question now, but have you got any comment that you might make? Are those figures that you recognise?

Dan Rogerson: They are not figures that we recognise. We very much welcome the work on this by the Lord Krebs Sub-Committee. I have met him and we have discussed some of the issues around this, and also around flood insurance and the other projects that we are taking forward at the moment. The statistics that they used and projected forward to find that figure do not take account of the money that has been spent at the moment, but we are happy to engage with the Sub-Committee and talk about those issues. As I say, you have used the phrase “do we recognise those”; I would not say that I recognise that £3 billion figure, no.

Cllr Jones: Can I just make a point on this figure? It was particularly important on behalf of the highways authorities because, in previous years, in 2010 for example, the Government allocated £100 million for highways recovery and £200 million in 2011, as a result of storms. We are aware that the level of water causes substantial damage to the structure of roads. Once the water actually clears—and we still have a lot of places underwater, and houses and families being disrupted at the moment—we will understand the cost of this and the cost of major road repairs as well, particularly where they have disappeared, and of course rail infrastructure in some coastal areas as well. Please do not just focus on the coastal side; we do need to look at the highway authorities and the Highways Agency’s responsibilities as well.

Dan Rogerson: Could I give just a little further information on Mr Fitzpatrick’s question about why we think some of those estimates may be out of date? We believe, and we are not sure because, as you say, it is based on an Environment Agency report in 2009, the long-term investment strategy from that point, that study is now out of date and, for example, we have published, or the Agency has been working on, an updated version for that. We have seen the publication of the new flood risk maps, which make different assumptions. Also, as I was saying earlier, the Environment Agency is now being more efficient than ever before in how it spends the money as well, getting more value out of that, so it has delivered a 33% saving in back-office costs and is on track to deliver a 15% efficiency saving in that capital budget, making the money go much further. We think that some of those assumptions should change on that basis.

Paul Leinster: Just to build on that, if I may, we are revising our long-term investment strategy. This time we will be including the need for maintenance money as well as capital spend within that. We are on track to be submitting that to Defra this summer, so we will be discussing those findings with Defra colleagues in the summer.

Q29 Chair: Could I just ask, to be absolutely clear, if you take the figure for this year's spend, it is £576.6 million total spent on flood spending? Is that from Defra, giving the grand total over the year of £2.3 billion, yes?

Dan Rogerson: The £2.3 billion figure is for the current Spending Review period and that includes capital and revenue funding. As I have been keen to point out, and Councillor Jones has made the point, there has been £148 million of partnership funding as well, which has allowed more schemes to be delivered.

Q30 Chair: To be absolutely clear, within the £2.3 billion, can you just tell us how much of that is capital and how much is maintenance?

Dan Rogerson: I would have to—

Chair: I am sorry, because this goes to the core of what everybody is saying. I will be the first to admit I am not very good with figures, but I just want to know, within that £2.3 billion, how much of it is going to build capital projects, and how much is going to go in maintenance. Do you have the figure, Mr Leinster?

Paul Leinster: Not to hand.

Q31 Chair: We seem to have a problem this week, in the Committee yesterday and the Committee today, with having elementary figures that go to the heart of the argument of how we respond to floods. It would be very nice if, by midday tomorrow, we could have an email that we will share with the public, on that £2.3 billion, which is not looking ahead, but is the current spending—it is a very simple, elementary question—how much of that is capital spending going on flood defence physical projects and how much of that is going, out of the total, on maintenance.

Dan Rogerson: We can certainly give you the current figures. We can also give you the planned investment that we secured with the Treasury for future years in capital investment.

Chair: Just this year would be good.

Dan Rogerson: Fine, and for future years how some of the revenue issues—absolutely we can give you that figure.

Chair: Then we know what we are talking. So midday tomorrow?

Dan Rogerson: Yes, that is fine.

Q32 Mrs Lewell-Buck: Just a quick question: in answer to my colleague, Mr Fitzpatrick, you said that some of the restoration-of-flood-defences projects are longer term. I am just curious how long term we are talking because, if there are more floods again, it is going to cost even more and there is going to be more tragedy and more upset for people. I am just curious—can you put some time scale on what you mean by “longer term”?

Dan Rogerson: As soon as is practically possible to do it, so we are talking months in some cases.

Paul Leinster: Just to explain, for some of the situation the flood defences are still underwater, so we physically cannot get to them to inspect them. For others, we will have in places discussions with Natural England and with others as to whether or not we are going to reinstate some of those defences, or whether we will allow the water that has now broken through to remain. You can imagine some of the places up on the north Norfolk coast or some of the places in Suffolk where some defences have broken through. They were protecting particular types of habitat. The question has to be: do we reinstate those defences and then allow freshwater habitat to re-establish or do we allow inter-tidal habitat to establish? These are big questions. The bit I would like to assure is that property and people are being protected, and we have carried out all of the emergency works that we need to, and have put temporary measures in place where we need to, to protect people and property.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: The longer-term stuff is not around people and property.

Paul Leinster: The bit that we need to do is, for example, if you look at some of the work we have done, we have done temporary repairs. We will now need to go back and do quite detailed engineering design work to make sure that we then repair that defence, which will hold if there is an event, but we need to make sure that we then reinstate it back to a long-term state that we would like.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: As soon as possible.

Paul Leinster: As soon as possible.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: So a matter of months?

Paul Leinster: No, not necessarily. The work that we have to do is quite detailed work and might take 12 months to carry out but, whilst we are in the interim situation, people and property are being protected.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I hope in the 12 months the £30 million figure does not rise, if that is all you have.

Q33 Mr Spencer: In the same vein to a certain extent, if these defences have been breached, surely reinstating them to the same level of integrity means that they are going to be breached again. Surely we should be looking at improving their integrity as we move forward.

Paul Leinster: We look at that, but we do design all defences to a certain level of protection. Typically on river systems, we would be designing flood risk management schemes that are protecting against river flooding to a one-in-100-year standard. If you get more than a one-in-100-year standard event, it will come over the top. For coastal, we will typically defend to either a one-in-200 or a one-in-300-year standard, but if you get an event that is bigger, then it will come over.

Q34 Mr Spencer: I do hear that, but in my constituency we have had one-in-100-year floods four or five times in the last three or four years. There is growing mistrust of the one-in-100-year standard. Would you support that?

Paul Leinster: These are difficult things to explain. It does not mean that, if you see a one-in-100-year event this year, you will not see another event of that nature next year.

That is the nature of it. You will go to other places where we have designed defences and they have not seen the flooding for many years. Those places might be questioning why they needed defences in the first place or why they have been put in a place where we are saying they are at a one-in-100-year risk of flooding. Flooding is the consequence of natural events and it is very difficult to predict those natural events sometimes.

Dan Rogerson: That is why we have all the contingency plans potentially for evacuation. Where it is a very extreme event, as we have had—for example in a few points on the east coast we are talking about one-in-500-year events—then you are into the real cost-benefit analysis. To get it to a higher standard, it could be a huge investment, which would suck in money that lots of other communities need for what they have to do. What I would say, and I would echo the comments of Mr Leinster, the model is there to protect people and property. In these recent flood events, hundreds of thousands of people have seen their homes protected by the infrastructure that is there, both that which has been there for decades and has been maintained and more recent investment. The Government will be continuing to invest, as I say, £2.3 billion in capital alone over the next Spending Review period to ensure that we protect even more communities.

Q35 Chair: Have you at the Department or at the Environment Agency ordered an audit of critical infrastructure, particularly pumps that may bail out the sub-stations of electricity and gas stations, or is that the responsibility of DECC?

Dan Rogerson: It would depend on where those pumps are and who has ownership of them.

Q36 Chair: Are you looking at this as part of the Defra—

Paul Leinster: If I may, the Civil Contingencies Secretariat has carried out a review of critical infrastructure.

Chair: That was some time ago.

Paul Leinster: It has been kept up to date and the Cabinet Office Minister is taking a particular interest in this topic as well and is reviewing the situation.

Q37 Neil Parish: Low levels of revenue funding threaten to erode the benefits that can be gained from capital investment in flood defences. Are there any plans to increase the proportion of funding allocated to flood defence maintenance? At the moment you are fire-fighting. I can understand that. The trouble is we never seem to get into a situation where we can improve the situation, because all the time we are dredging the rivers, for instance. All those things seem to get put back, because we are having to deal with day-to-day flooding events. What is the situation? I will fire at the Minister first.

Dan Rogerson: Thank you very much, Mr Parish. Clearly the figures I have been quoting have involved maintenance as well as capital spend. It is crucial that we continue to deliver new schemes to protect communities that are seeing risks for the first time. As the coastline changes, as Mr Leinster has said, we have to adapt to that and make sure we are bringing in new schemes. There is always a list for that, but maintenance is crucial. The examples we have been given today about recovery from the recent events show that it remains a priority that we deal with that. I do think we should see the position improving as we protect more and more properties with this investment.

Coming back to issues like the future of the flood insurance model, which is in the current Water Bill, as a Member of that Bill Committee, we discussed there that that is a transitional measure moving towards a market-based solution on the basis of continued investment in protecting more and more properties. That is very much what we want to do. I hope, Mr Parish, that you will accept that our intention and what we are delivering is improving the situation; it is getting better.

With regard to the situation of dredging, which you mentioned in particular, the Government has allowed a number of pilots to move forward. I am working with Internal Drainage Boards on areas where that is a success. The Environment Agency has a programme; Mr Leinster will probably say more about where maintenance of channels and watercourses is occurring. There are particular examples of local circumstances, and I have visited the Levels recently, where people are very much of the view that we could make a difference locally.

Where we are, though, in terms of investment is that that has to stack up against the other priorities for investment that we make. In the case of the Levels, I am very keen to do something to meet the aspirations of communities there, but we have to work with them and I very much welcome the offer of contribution from local authorities, including the county council there, to make progress on that. To be fair to all communities, we have to make sure that that stacks up.

Q38 Neil Parish: Minister, if I could just interrupt you there, the trouble with the Levels is that, two years ago, they absolutely flooded. All the grass disappeared. All the flora and fauna that you are trying to conserve all got destroyed. There they are absolutely covered in water again. Meanwhile, you talk about, and I think Mr Leinster talked about, taking early action. Are the pumps turned on in time? Are the ditches cleared to get the water into the rivers? The answer is they are not. We sit here, dare I say it, Minister, fiddling while Rome floods again. That is exactly what is happening.

Dan Rogerson: For the people who are on the Levels, those who see their properties flooded, of which fortunately there were few in number, it is incredibly significant for those who do. For farmers who see their livelihoods affected, living on the Levels they are used to seeing flooding, but it is how long it occurs for, how early it happens and how quickly we can get the water away. I accept that. For communities like Muchelney that have been cut off, there are all sorts of other issues there. We want to work with communities in the Levels and across Somerset to improve the situation.

Pumps are pumping on the Levels to remove the water. We have to be careful where they are pumping it to. There are other communities and we have to make sure that we are doing that on a managed approach. What we do not want to see is one community seeing water flooded away from their doorstep and it ending up causing a problem farther down the catchment, so we have to be very careful on that. I am very much open to suggestions about how we could move forward on the issue of the capacity of the rivers, but I am not in a position where I am able to make any commitments on that now. That is a matter we will take forward as we look at the situation.

Q39 Neil Parish: If you take the Levels, the only way to get rid of the water from the Levels is to get it to the sea, and the only way to get it to the sea is through the Parrett and there are various canals as well. Basically, where the Tone and the Parrett meet at Burrowbridge it is

silted and it has been silted now for many years. We have got to sort that. I am sorry; I think we are getting closer, but we have been talking about it for a year or two years. Those people there want to know when you are going to do something about it.

Dan Rogerson: I speak as a Minister who has been in post since October and I have visited the Levels—

Neil Parish: I do not blame you for all that has happened in the past.

Dan Rogerson: My predecessor, the hon. Member for Newbury, Mr Benyon, has visited on a number of occasions and has set work in train locally to come up with solutions. There are some very good organisations locally, such as the Royal Bath & West Society, the Internal Drainage Board and others, which are looking to come up with solutions to raise money to contribute towards that and we much welcome it. However, the Agency has been undertaking some drainage work on pinch points on the Parrett and Tone catchments. However, of course that has been held back by the recent flooding, because they are not able to get in and do that dredging while the event is taking place. I do not know if Mr Leinster wants to add anything there.

Paul Leinster: We spend around £2 million a year on maintenance work on the Somerset Levels and Moors. Just now we have 32 fixed pumps on the Levels and Moors, and we have brought in another 24 temporary pumps. The issue that we have just now with this current weather situation is that, as you know, the drainage of the Levels and Moors depends on the ability of the water to get out to sea. We have had very high tides and that has created tide locking so, essentially, we have reduced the outflow whilst having intense rainfall across the catchment, which has not been able to go anywhere. That has been one of the issues in this particular situation. If we had pumped earlier, we would have pumped into the rivers and the rivers would have spilled straight back on to the Levels and Moors, and we would have had a circular pumping activity.

We have, as the Minister said, reprioritised about £350,000 last year to do pinch point work. We did five areas on the River Tone. We have another five planned for this February. We know that a capital dredge of the Parrett, Tone and Brue would cost about £4 million. If you use partnership funding, which is the tariff-based system that we use to decide where we can invest grant-in-aid money from Government, then the contribution from central Government to that is about £350,000. The local councils have come forward with money, so we have got up to about £1 million so far, and the Bath & West Society is looking at how they can bridge the gap between the money that is available so far and what needs to be done, but we are actively looking at this just now and seeing what can be done.

Q40 Neil Parish: Can I ask you how much of that £4 million is getting rid of the so-called waste from out of the river rather than actually spreading it as silt, or have you gone off that idea that it is waste and it has to be taken away? That is a lot of the cost.

Paul Leinster: In those situations, if we are doing the work, there are exemptions when we do the work, just as if others are doing the work, which have to be applied for, but we will apply for those waste exemptions and then you can spread the material locally.

Q41 Neil Parish: I farm at the end of the Parrett, so I know exactly what the tidal surge is like. If you actually have that river in a state that, when you actually start the pump, the water will move, especially from the Tone direction, if you have that river flowing better, when you have the tide dropping, you will get more water out to sea. It is a case of how much water you can get in a given period out to sea. I accept the higher tides, but I still maintain that, unless you have that river flowing properly, you will not get the water out in time. This is where the problem is. I am reassured in some ways that a scheme is coming together but, like I say, those farmers, those property owners, those people living out in the Moors are so fed up because, year on year now, they are getting flooded. Can I just ask what the time scale is that finally you reckon it will be dredged?

Dan Rogerson: It very much depends on putting together a funding package that stacks up in terms of meeting the aspirations we have to make our money go as far as possible. That is the key thing; we have to look at the economic benefits. Having been recently to look at the economic impact in terms of transport infrastructure and the impact on those communities, it is very high, but we are at the stage when we are looking at that.

Q42 Neil Parish: Linked into this is whether there has been any discussions between Defra and the Environment Agency about the potential impact of the maintenance budget on the risk of future flooding. I think this is key to it. Within the overall capital budget, and the Chairman has asked this question, how much of it is maintenance?

Paul Leinster: One of the things that we are looking for, as I mentioned in my response to Mr Fitzpatrick, is the long-term investment strategy review, which is looking at what the optimum balance should be between revenue expenditure and capital expenditure. We are carrying out a lot of work on that just now and will be in a position to discuss that with Defra colleagues in the summer.

Q43 Neil Parish: This is fundamental. Unless you actually change the formula, there will never be enough money in there for maintenance. Would you accept that?

Dan Rogerson: There will be different impacts in different local areas, because of the effects that we are talking about. We talked about a particular very acute example, but I would say that I also very much welcome the work that Internal Drainage Boards and others do using the levy money that they have to carry out maintenance. The Environment Agency obviously contributes on the main rivers with what they do. When you are talking about maintenance here, Mr Parish, I assume you are talking about rivers rather than flood defences themselves.

Q44 Neil Parish: Yes. I think Drainage Boards do an excellent job, but again funding has to come down for that.

The LGA has previously told the Committee that local councils are working with the Environment Agency and other partners to find long-term sustainable solutions to the withdrawal of maintenance activities by the Environment Agency. Can you provide any examples of any solutions that have been found and examples of success that local councils have had to date? I do not know whether Mr Jones wants to have a go.

Cllr Jones: I am not sure of the answer to that one, I am afraid. In terms of Drainage Boards, we have to remember that they have some flexibility to address some of the issues

that arise in the Drainage Board areas, but the Local Audit and Accountability Bill, which is just about to be given royal assent, actually stops any increases to accommodate any issues identified. They are going to be slightly hamstrung in terms of being able to finance some of the things. We are aware of a number of schemes with the Environment Agency, where they are going to reduce maintenance, and I certainly have one in my own area where they are going to allow the area to flood naturally and turn the pumps off. That is around the Ince Marshes up by Frodsham, so there are issues in terms of maintenance in that respect that I am aware of.

Paul Leinster: One of the things that we are doing is that, now that the IDBs are flood risk management authorities, as we are, we are then able to procure work from each other more efficiently and more effectively. We now have an agreement with six IDBs—

Chair: We are coming on to this. I do not want to pre-empt it.

Q45 Richard Drax: Just quickly, Mr Leinster, the perception is—I have heard it many times, and Mr John Lloyd, chairman of the Flood Prevention Society raised it again—that rivers are not being cleaned out. They are not being inspected. No one is walking up and down them. Trees across them are not being—you have heard it before. What he is saying is, at the moment, Natural England pounce on floods and some environmental designation is slapped on it. Can you reassure the Committee and me that this is not how the future is going to be, if indeed it is happening now, and that rivers will be maintained, de-silted and all the things that used to happen so that this flood water can do what it naturally is meant to do, rather than meeting the expectations of some environmental groups, which perhaps are a little bit unrealistic? Does the human being not come first?

Paul Leinster: What we need to understand in some of these situations is what the responsibilities of the riparian owner are. We produced a booklet that is called ‘Living on the Edge’. In some of those situations, where trees might be across, if those trees are not adding to flood risk, then it is the responsibility of the riparian owner and not the Environment Agency to clear them. One of the things that we are doing in some other work is making it easier or less bureaucratic for landowners to do their own maintenance. We have a pilot going on in seven different areas, working with farming groups, with landowners and with local authorities to work out how we can get maintenance work that we may have carried out on a discretionary basis in the past now carried out by others, but without as many bureaucratic hurdles as there used to be.

Q46 Chair: You will share with us the results of the pilots in due course.

Paul Leinster: Yes.

Q47 Iain McKenzie: I have some questions on the partnership funding. The first one is: how successful would you say the partnership funding model has been to date?

Dan Rogerson: I would say, as you might expect, very successful. In the previous Spending Review period, £13 million was pulled in, in partnership funding or funding from other sources, which is obviously helpful but, in this Spending Review period, it has been £148 million or will be by the end of the Spending Review period. There has been a real step change in that. We have heard from Councillor Jones and Mr Leinster that some

of the schemes that have allowed us to deliver are already protecting property and people around the country.

As I said earlier, there is a recognition that we can achieve several different outcomes through some schemes. For example, in part answer to Mr Drax's point about the demand to improve the quality of the natural environment as well and protect biodiversity, some schemes in some parts may involve the creation of wetlands and things like that to manage water resources, which are achieving multiple outcomes. In the case of some coastal communities, it might be providing better moorings, to provide more leisure opportunities or to recreate sandy beaches. There are multiple outcomes, which local authorities see the benefit of, not just in terms of flood protection, but in terms of their overall plan for their communities in taking them forward. I would say that in the increase from that £13 million to £148 million we have seen a big success story.

Cllr Jones: One issue I would have on this is that there are some flood defences that actually open up land for development and there should be an ability to claw back some of that increase in value to pay for the flood defences. That will enable the money to go a lot further. I do know that certainly the Secretary of State for Defra mentioned a scheme, I think in Nottingham, where they put some flood defences up and it enabled a load of brownfield land to be available for commercial development. It would seem sensible the uplift in that value should be translated in a claw-back system to pay for further defences elsewhere. We can get better at certainly the private-sector involvement in flood defences.

Q48 Iain McKenzie: The final question would be that we have already heard of the £148 million. £40 million was the figure put in from the private sector. With that in mind, how can more private-sector funding be encouraged and hopefully secured?

Dan Rogerson: In some cases, it might be around economic opportunity. It may be around those who have an interest, as referred to by Mr Jones, in bringing land forward for development that is currently blighted by flood risk. It might not be commercially viable to develop that, so there would be some benefit to people who are involved in future developments bringing them forward. We have seen owners of factories and so on who want to make sure that their assets are protected make an investment as well. What the Government is trying to do is make it easier, set out the formula that allows everybody to analyse what the benefits are of investment—those in the private sector, local government and ourselves centrally on behalf of the taxpayer. As the model has been seen to work, hopefully it will encourage others to come forward and take up those opportunities as well.

Q49 Iain McKenzie: You have seen that there has been an ongoing approach and encouragement by Government to the private sector.

Dan Rogerson: Absolutely. As I say, we have colleagues in local government as well with their capital programmes to achieve some of the economic development outcomes and other outcomes that they want for their communities as well.

Q50 Iain McKenzie: From a local government perspective, how do you see that being able to lever the added monies from the private sector with the lure of bringing land into a usable condition, in the future?

Cllr Jones: As I mentioned, there are opportunities where increasing value should be able to get claw-back on that. There is also in kind as well, in terms of contributing to the flood defences. I certainly have, in my own borough, a scheme in Northwich for example, where we are designing flood defences for £5 million, to which we as a council are putting £500,000 in, but that is enabling confidence to be developed within the town. Where they have built a new Waitrose supermarket, it has been designed to a level where it actually forms part of the future flood defences. You can actually solve a number of problems by different approaches. Working with the private sector to develop schemes that enable flood defences to become part of it, although when you look at it, it does not look like it is, it is designed in terms of its levels to protect parts of the town as well, so there are different ways of solving. It is about working in partnership with the private sector in particular areas.

Q51 Chair: Councillor Jones, I know you are writing to us about sandbags. I do not suppose you will have had time to read the report published today by the Committee on Climate Change adaptation. We will send you the text, but it would be helpful if you could also write to us. Following the question that I asked earlier, there is an allegation here from the Committee on Climate Change that the Government figure that you are now getting as local authorities together is £129 million. Of that, £13.5 million additional was destined to be spent on flood and coastal erosion in 2012-13, over and above what was spent in 2010-11. You were given £36 million to fund their new roles. Now, what the Committee on Climate Change has concluded and I quote, because this is their words, is, "This suggests more than half of the £129 million being provided is not being spent on local flood risk management". That is quite a serious charge and you may want to just go away, think about that and perhaps write to the Committee and share your thoughts with us on that, because you were a little bit dismissive in your earlier reply, and I want to give you the opportunity to reply in more detail.

Cllr Jones: Thank you. That is very new to me. I was not aware of that, Chairman.

Q52 Mrs Lewell-Buck: My question is again for the Minister. Bearing in mind that we have established that there are limited finances out there, why is the Government not supporting cheaper back-to-nature schemes, such as tree planting and deliberate flooding in hills to protect lowland homes, especially when this is estimated to save tens of millions of pounds and has been successful elsewhere?

Dan Rogerson: As the Chairman knows, there is a scheme in her constituency, which is now underway, which will pursue that approach. The Government is undertaking research there and in other locations on that approach, which we think can deliver. We also have to make sure we are using all the data. I would dispute some recent reports that we have had that that is the answer to everything, because it is not.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I do not think it is, either. It is an option.

Dan Rogerson: Absolutely. I was not suggesting you were but, in some places, it has been suggested in the media that this is the answer to everything. It has a contribution to play and we are very much exploring that and willing to work with communities and landowners on that. In other places, there will need to be different forms of defence, those that we have seen elsewhere, still being pursued.

In terms of tree planting, as I am also the Minister for Forestry, I am very keen to see that, and so I am very pleased that we have brought forward a scheme to continue planting between the closing years of the Common Agricultural Policy round and the next one, which will ensure that we carry on with our tree planting programmes. If there are schemes that want to take advantage of that to meet these sorts of needs, they would have the opportunity to do that as well. There is scope to do that and we are exploring that as a Government and researching that. The scheme in Miss McIntosh's constituency is an example of that, but we will continue to look at all sorts of ways, whether hard or soft engineering, for protecting property, people and agricultural land as well.

Q53 Mrs Lewell-Buck: The criticism that has been levelled towards the Government against it is misplaced, I suppose is what you are saying, because it is something that you are prepared to look at and you are looking at.

Dan Rogerson: Absolutely. If it is the best and most cost-effective solution, then Government and the Agency would bring forward schemes to do that.

Q54 Roger Williams: In our notes, we are pointed to a scheme in Pontbren in Wales, which is a tree-planting scheme, but there are also schemes of blocking up ditches that have been made on moorland over years in order to slow down the runoff of water. Does the Minister see any possibility, now that he has at his disposal 12% modulation, that farmers could be recompensed in some way for doing what would be a public good?

Dan Rogerson: I know the Committee has previously been very interested in payment for ecosystem services and that whole approach, which the Government is taking forward as well. There is scope for doing that, as there is for a whole range of things. I have had meetings recently on issues of water quality as well and how we can work with farmers and landowners on that. There are multiple goods we can achieve with particular schemes that will tick a lot of boxes, and we have to make sure we use those Pillar 2 resources and also greening of Pillar 1 to see what we can do to improve the situation.

Q55 Chair: Could I just add that I am delighted to have the scheme? It is a real partnership approach, but have you considered going to insurance companies and asking them? When the infrastructure package was launched in the autumn Budget statement, there were calls for lots of private-sector involvement. Would it not be natural for insurance companies to be involved in that type of project, because then it would prevent flooding, so they will not have to pay out compensation in the future? Is that something we are actively looking at?

Dan Rogerson: I am happy to discuss with all sorts of sectors, if they feel that they would have a role to play in it. With the insurance markets, unlike a water company, where you would have one water and sewage company and a wholesaler now, under the new model going forward, supplying water and having an interest in a geographical location, insurance companies, by their very nature, have customers spread out across the country, so it would be a slightly different model. We are working very closely with them on flood insurance for householders, particularly with the new Flood Re schemes. We continue to have discussions with them on responses to recent events and so on.

Paul Leinster: I have in the past had some conversations with insurance companies about whether or not they would invest and the usual response is that they price risk, not reduce risk.

Chair: We will think about that one.

Q56 Mrs Lewell-Buck: Just a really quick question: the Internal Drainage Board maintenance pilots were launched in October last year. I am just wondering how that is going.

Dan Rogerson: Some of the areas, as we have heard, will be affected by the events we have been through, so we are not at the stage yet where we are able to report back on that. As Mr Leinster said earlier, I think we will be able to share that information and we will be publishing that information when we get it.

Q57 Mrs Lewell-Buck: Do you know when you might get it?

Paul Leinster: The maintenance pilots were going to be a year and they did not start until October, so it will not be until next October that we report back on them.

Q58 Neil Parish: Can I ask how widespread you are with the Drainage Boards? Are you giving more and more ability to Drainage Boards? Could we have more Drainage Boards? Would that be of benefit, devolving powers down?

Paul Leinster: We are actively looking in different places. When we withdraw from maintenance, we are having a number of conversations about establishing Drainage Boards, in both the north and the south of the country.

Dan Rogerson: The issues there are around, in some locations, the establishment of those, through which properties and land would be subject to levy. To make some of these work financially, you might have to go slightly further afield than those who are immediately affected, and then you are involved in a discussion with those local communities about whether they can see the benefit of contributing to that work, so it is a very sensitive and painstaking area of work that the Agency is taking forward.

Chair: I think we will have to move on. I should just add that I am a Vice President, a non-pecuniary position, of the Association of Drainage Authorities.

Q59 Richard Drax: Can we just go on to the jobs that have been lost—1,700 by 2014? How is this going to impact the Environment Agency's work, Mr Leinster?

Paul Leinster: We have not yet decided what the number is. Those were numbers that were leaked from the Environment Agency and were based on scenarios—planning scenarios that we have been establishing as we forward-planned our work. On the basis of that, we have then said that we had, last October, about 11,400 people in the Environment Agency and that we would have to reduce to around 9,700 or 9,800 by next October. We are currently looking at how we will do that.

One of the things that we are consulting on just now is people may know that we are organised on an area/regional/national basis. What we are looking at is how we can take those jobs that are currently done on a regional basis and either do them by area or nationally. What savings are there to be had in doing that? We are also looking at how we can further reduce our back-office costs and support-service costs. As the Minister said earlier, over this Spending Review period, we have already reduced our support service costs by 33% and we are part of a Cabinet Office shared service, which we went

into in October for our finance and HR transactional costs. We are looking at how we can reduce all of our costs and yet, at the same time, maximise the outcomes that we deliver with the available funding.

Q60 Richard Drax: Can I just cut in? I hear what you say. I have got this “where the jobs may go”. I presume that is leaked to, is it?

Paul Leinster: Yes, it is.

Q61 Richard Drax: The area offices are the ones that are going to be hit most, nearly 1,000 jobs there. Flooding, 557 jobs; and environment and business—I presume the environment is connected to flooding—is 659, making a total of 1,200 jobs. You are looking at quite significant cuts, whether they are exactly accurate or not. Can you just answer my question? These sorts of numbers surely are going to impact what you do. I just remind you too, if I may, of what Mr Lloyd said: that there is no one walking up and down the rivers now. There is not going to be anybody walking up and down the rivers if you make cuts of this size.

Neil Parish: They are all in London.

Richard Drax: How are you going to cope with this?

Paul Leinster: We are not alone in having to deal with reductions in funding across the public service. We have to make sure that we deliver as efficient and effective a service as possible, within the funding that we are given. We will still be, at the end of this period, a 10,000-person organisation, the vast majority of which are based in areas, not centrally. Our budget will be about £1 billion a year. There are a lot of things that we are able to do within that. There will be certain things that we used to do that we are not able to do, going forward, and that is what we are discussing just now. That is what we are having to manage.

Q62 Richard Drax: Can I be slightly more specific if I may, Mr Leinster? We always hear frontline services will not be affected and then they always are. Can you reassure us that frontline services, i.e. those people who do walk the rivers and who do very important work like that—the cuts, if they come and when they come, will be at a managerial level, rather than those actually on the ground? Is there any way you can clarify that?

Paul Leinster: We have already reduced our management overheads, so this has to be seen in an overall context.

Q63 Richard Drax: Will frontline services therefore be affected?

Paul Leinster: Frontline jobs will certainly be affected. One of things that we have to do is to see how, through this period, we are able to maximise the services provided by finding different and new ways of doing things, but with these levels of cuts, this level of funding reduction and this level of reduced people, we will be able to do less.

Q64 Richard Drax: Will maintenance work and flood-risk management be affected disproportionately?

Paul Leinster: The Minister said to Mr Fitzpatrick, “I do not recognise these figures”, and I do not recognise those figures. They are a planning assumption. They are not the figures

that we are using within my management team. They are not the figure that we discussed with the board. We are in the process of deciding what it is that we do.

Q65 Chair: We are going to have to move on, because we have very little time. I am sure we will have other opportunities to return. Just two quick questions on sustainable drains, Minister: why has the implementation of SuDS regulations been delayed yet again? A short answer.

Dan Rogerson: The short answer is that we have to reassure all the Departments across Government, and the agencies and sectors that are involved in this work, that we have something that will work when it is introduced, and that is deliverable.

Q66 Chair: What is the cause of the delay? Who is blocking that?

Dan Rogerson: No one is blocking it but, in terms of discussing with my colleagues in local government, and those in the homebuilding sector—we want to make sure that we continue to deliver the homes that we need as a country and that local authorities can be confident that there is a process that will work. We are confident now that we are in that direction, which is why I will be tabling those regulations in April. If we can get it done before that would be wonderful, but certainly April is the target.

Chair: That is the target date for publishing.

Dan Rogerson: Absolutely.

Q67 Chair: When do you expect to have the measures actually implemented?

Dan Rogerson: We again are discussing a date with colleagues in local government, consulting with them about the best point to do that. We would anticipate doing that in the autumn of this year.

Q68 Mr Spencer: Can I turn to climate change? How much climate change are we building into this whole scenario and how relevant is it?

Dan Rogerson: We very much build into the schemes that we are bringing forward the assumptions that are being made under climate change. As someone who served on this Committee for three and a half years and has seen the evidence, I believe that the climate is changing and that there is a human contribution to doing that. We are moving therefore in terms of mitigation and, crucially, adaptation in this Department. Yes, we take account of that. Now, regarding the extreme weather events we have had recently, I am not a scientist so I would take advice about how much those are linked with climate change, but we do know that the climate is changing. There has been an accusation that we have not taken these things into account as we plan flood defences, but we do and we will continue to do so.

Q69 Mr Spencer: What do you say to those who say that, actually, you would be better not spending money on mitigating climate change; you may as well spend everything on coping with the effects of that climate change, rather than trying to stop the climate from changing?

Dan Rogerson: We have a Climate Change Act, which the Government operates within the framework of, as does local government and as do industry. As a society, we are moving to tackle carbon emissions on that mitigation side, as well as particularly what Defra does dealing with adaptation, although we have some role in terms of mitigation as well. I do not find the two things to be in any way mutually exclusive and there are other benefits to our economy of looking at decarbonisation as well, but that is probably wider than the scope of your inquiry today.

Q70 Mr Spencer: On Flood Re, by how far is that going to miss its 2015 summer deadline? Do you think you are going to miss your summer 2015 deadline or by how far?

Dan Rogerson: The crucial thing for me as a Minister coming into Government is to hit our legislative timetable. As you will know, Mr Spencer, having been involved in part of that, the Bill left the Commons and is now coming towards second reading in the House of Lords. There is a timetable that will see us move forward to that receiving royal assent on schedule and then we move forward with the implementation side. I obviously look at this regularly, but I have seen no indications that there would be a delay in implementing that. This is not just something on the legislative side; this is something that the industry very much wants and the sector is taking forward and is committing to doing so. I welcome the work that the ABI and all the insurance companies have made in coming to this agreement and in now working to make a deliverable solution, which will provide affordable home insurance to many people who have to labour under the blight of not being able to get that.

Q71 Chair: Given the fact that we have run out of time, could you perhaps elaborate a little bit more on, for example, what the programme is for getting state aid approval on Flood Re?

Dan Rogerson: Yes, I would be happy to give the information to the Committee.

Chair: Perhaps you could give us in writing what you think are the key lessons to be learned from the exercise. We are very grateful. Mr Leinster, Mr Rogerson and Councillor Jones, thank you very much indeed for being with us.