

Cabinet

19 May 2026

2026 Flood Investigation Studies

For Decision

Cabinet Member:

Cllr J Andrews, Place Services

Local Councillor(s): All

Senior Leadership Team:

J Britton, Executive Director Regeneration, Infrastructure and Growth

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Statutory Authority: Highway Authority and Lead Local Flood Authority

Report status: Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

1. Executive summary

This report sets out how Dorset Council is working alongside communities to learn from the flooding experienced during the winter of 2025–26, and to build stronger local resilience for the future. A £9.25 million programme of work is already under way, helping our communities to recover from the winter flooding and improve future resilience.

Exceptional rainfall, including Storm Chandra, led to widespread flooding that affected homes, businesses, roads and vital services. Many communities experienced significant disruption, and in some cases devastating impacts. Following the initial emergency response, the Council has acted quickly to repair roads, clear gulleys and drains that were blocked by soil and detritus washed into drains by flood water and improve future flood resilience.

Work is already planned on a number of substantial repair and recovery schemes, which will be undertaken within the next few months, including £456,000 of investment at Old Sherborne Road in Cerne Abbas, Horton Road and Main Road in Godmanstone.

The next step is listening, learning and working together with communities and partner organisations.

Dorset Council as Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) has a statutory duty under section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 to investigate flooding incidents to the extent that it considers it necessary or appropriate to do so.

This report proposes a structured approach to discharging those duties through the production of two types of flooding investigation report:

- **Strategic Flood Investigation Reports:** where the scale or consequences of a flooding event make a detailed investigation necessary or appropriate; and
- **Community Flood Review Reports:** where a more proportionate, locality focused investigation is appropriate.

Both types of report will be published, shared with affected communities and partners and will inform future investment in flood resilience. Importantly, these investigations will focus on practical actions and quick wins, as well as longer term flooding solutions. Members, residents, town and parish councils, local businesses and partner organisations will be closely involved throughout.

By combining local knowledge with technical expertise, this programme will help communities to be heard, supported and better prepared for the challenges of a changing climate. All parts of Dorset are already benefiting from the extra investment in flooding resilience, and future investment is not limited to the areas identified for Section 19 investigations.

Cabinet is asked to approve this approach, the proposed investigation localities, and the associated governance and funding arrangements.

2. Recommendation(s)

Cabinet is asked to:

- 2.1 Approve the approach to the flooding investigations set out in this report including the use of Strategic Flood Investigations and Community Flood Reviews in accordance with the proposed framework.
- 2.2 Approve the areas for flooding investigations (Appendix A), comprising:
 - a. A Dorset-wide strategic overview report that looks at flooding issues in Dorset's three main river catchment areas.

- b. Strategic/Detailed Flood Investigations in accordance with the proposed criteria described in this report.
 - c. Community Flood Reviews where a Section 19 investigation is otherwise considered appropriate.
- 2.3 Allocate a capital budget of £5 million for flooding resilience measures, including but not limited to addressing the outcomes of Section 19 investigations; and
- 2.4 Delegate authority to the Executive Director for Regeneration, Infrastructure and Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Place Services and the Section 151 Officer, to authorise expenditure from that capital budget, with any individual scheme with a value exceeding £500,000 to be reported to Cabinet for specific approval.

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

- 3.1 To meet Dorset Council's statutory duty under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, to investigate significant flooding, in a lawful, transparent and proportionate manner.
- 3.2 To ensure residents, town and parish councils and local businesses receive clear, practical and locality-specific flooding information and guidance that they can own and use for their benefit as part of our wider approach to climate adaptation.
- 3.3 To develop a consistent strategic picture across Dorset's main river catchments and the highway network, so that partners including the Environment Agency and Wessex Water can align actions and future investment.
- 3.4 To support an evidence-led programme to target the Council's flooding resilience funding. This strategic approach will optimise the opportunity to secure additional external match funding, to supplement the £9.25m already committed by the Council.

4. Background

- 4.1 Dorset experienced several intense rainfall events through January 2026, culminating in Storm Chandra (26–27th), which delivered exceptionally heavy rain onto already saturated ground. This led to increased surface water run-off

into already swollen rivers and streams, with groundwater reaching unprecedented levels.

- 4.2 Flooding was widespread across Dorset, affecting residential properties, businesses, the road network and sewage systems. In the worst cases, the internal property flooding to people's homes was devastating.
- 4.3 Following Storm Chandra, conditions remained unsettled through February and into March 2026. The Environment Agency's Wessex situation reports show that January 2026 was the second wettest on record for the Wessex area, with average rainfall being 200% of the long-term average with 190mm rainfall. Groundwater levels across the chalk aquifer were above normal to exceptionally high throughout February and March. Multiple Environment Agency groundwater flood warnings remained in force to the end of March. These extreme weather events are becoming more common linked to climate change and the need to build resilience in our communities through partnership is a critical part of our approach to climate adaptation.
- 4.4 A number of Dorset's main roads became temporarily impassable. These included:
- Parts of the A37, A354, A350, A356 and the B3092
 - A35 from Organford Lane to A351 Bakers Arms
 - A35 at Winterbourne Abbas (National Highways Trunk Road)
 - A351 at Corfe Castle.
- 4.5 The Council recorded a 92% increase in reported potholes due to water damage, a 54% increase in other road defects again due to water damage and run-off, and an 83% increase in emergency callouts to close roads, establish diversions and support people suffering from flooding – compared to the same period last year.
- 4.6 In the immediate response to the road damage, over four thousand potholes have already been repaired, but many roads have suffered structural damage that has reduced their long-term integrity.
- 4.7 The next phase of recovery work is planned to run throughout Spring 2026, taking advantage of the drier conditions needed to make effective, long-term repairs. This will involve patching or resurfacing roads that have significantly deteriorated following the winter weather. Further improvements will be delivered following the flood investigations proposed in this report, to prepare the programme of work that will strengthen our local flooding resilience.

5. Recovery, Investigations and long-term improvements

- 5.1 Dorset Council is the Lead Local Flood Authority for its area. Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 requires Lead Local Flood Authorities to investigate flooding incidents to the extent that it considers investigation to be necessary or appropriate, to publish the results, and notify relevant risk management authorities. The act does not prescribe thresholds, formats, or report types. Decisions on the scale and form of investigation are matters of judgement informed by the nature and impacts of flooding events.
- 5.2 The flooding experienced across Dorset during the winter of 2025-26 was exceptional both in severity and in geographic extent. A large number of communities experienced flooding impacts, some of which if considered in isolation, would not ordinarily trigger a formal section 19 investigation under the Council's standard procedures. These procedures however did not anticipate flooding at the scale, duration and cumulative impact observed during winter 2025-26.
- 5.3 In these circumstances and having regard to the wording of Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, Dorset Council proposes to exercise its discretion so as to investigate a broader range of flooding incidents than would normally be taken forward for formal investigation.
- 5.4 This approach to the council's assessment is necessary and appropriate to do so in order to:
- Understand the cumulative impacts of widespread flooding;
 - provide communities with clarity and assurance during unprecedented disruption; and
 - inform a co-ordinated, evidence-led programme of flood recovery and future resilience.
- 5.5 The approach set out in this report does not replace nor amend the statutory test under Section 19. Rather, it represents a reasoned and proportionate application of that test in response to a flooding event of exceptional scale.
- 5.6 To ensure clarity, consistency and proportionality, Dorset Council proposes to undertake two forms of investigation under its Section 19 duties:
- Strategic Flood Investigations; and
 - Community Flood Review Reports.

- 5.7 The investigations will document what happened, clarify responsibilities, and co-produce practical resilience actions with communities and partners, while supplying robust evidence to prioritise Dorset Council's investment in flood resilience infrastructure. As part of the investigation process, evidence, feedback and suggestions will be sought from Local Members, Town & Parish Councils, residents, businesses, and partner organisations including the Environment Agency and Wessex Water. Appendix A shows the list of locations identified for investigation.
- 5.8 The Environment Agency has already undertaken a number of drop-in events about the recent flooding for members of the public. Dorset Council officers have attended these events and recorded feedback that will be included in the investigation reports. Details of the events are shown in Appendix 3.

Strategic Flood Investigations

- 5.9 Strategic Flood Investigation will be undertaken where the Council considers that the scale, severity or wider consequences of flooding make a comprehensive investigation necessary or appropriate. These investigations will typically be undertaken where flooding involves one or more of the following impacts:
- Internal flooding to five or more residential properties;
 - Flooding of two or more business premises;
 - Flooding of one or more items of critical infrastructure; or
 - A transport link being totally impassable for a significant period.
- 5.10 These factors are guidance criteria only and do not limit the Council's discretion to undertake a Strategic Flood Investigation in other circumstances where it considers this necessary or appropriate.
- 5.11 Strategic Flood Investigations will ordinarily include a fuller technical assessment, structured engagement with relevant risk management authorities, and strategic recommendations to inform future investment and partnership working.

Community Flood Reviews

- 5.12 Community Flood Reviews would be undertaken under section 19 where flooding has had clear local impacts that require further investigation, but where the Council considers that a more proportionate, locality-focused approach is appropriate, including in circumstances where the indicative criteria for Strategic Flood Investigations are not met.

5.13 Community Flood Reviews will focus on:

- Explaining what happened during the flooding event;
- clarifying the roles and responsibilities of relevant organisations and land owners;
- identifying practical actions and opportunities to improve local resilience; and
- supporting communities to better understand and prepare for future flooding.

5.14 These reviews will be led by Dorset Council and informed by community engagement. Communities not identified within appendix A will be able to request new flood resilience actions by providing structured evidence set out in an investigation pack available from floodriskmanagement@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

5.15 Both reviews will inform a Dorset-wide overview report that looks at flooding issues in Dorset's three main river catchment areas and the highway network, clarifying the roles of Dorset Council, Town and Parish Councils, Dorset Association of Parish & Town Councils, the Environment Agency and Wessex Water. The strategic report will collate the community-based investigation reports and provide overarching recommendations for improving flood resilience.

5.16 At its meeting on 10 February 2026, Full Council recognised the exceptional impact of the Winter 2025–26 flooding and committed in principle to the creation of additional capital and revenue funding to support flood recovery and resilience, subject to Cabinet approval. Further detail is set out in the Financial Implications section of this report.

6. Alternative options considered

6.1 An alternative approach would be to limit investigations to only those flooding incidents warranting the most comprehensive form of investigation.

6.1.1 This approach is not recommended as it would give a lower level of support to communities that have suffered with flooding and could benefit from detailed investigation, but do not meet the criteria. Such an approach is likely to lead to unanswered questions, community dissatisfaction and a poorer level of flooding resilience.

- 6.1.2 The additional capital flood resilience investment should be based on local need. Without such a level of investigation, the subsequent investment programme may not align with the specific needs of affected communities.

7. Legal considerations

- 7.1 Dorset Council, as the Lead Local Flood Authority, has a duty under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 to investigate flood incidents to the extent that it considers such investigation to be necessary or appropriate, to publish the results and to notify the relevant risk management authorities.
- 7.2 Any previous local guidance relating to flooding investigations was and remains non-statutory and cannot fetter the Council's discretion. The approach proposed in this report represents a lawful and rational exercise of that discretion in response to the scale and nature of flooding experienced during Winter 2025–26.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 In response to the exceptional flooding experienced during Winter 2025–26, Full Council at its meeting on 10 February 2026 recognised the need for additional investment to support flood recovery and longer-term resilience measures. At that meeting, Full Council committed in principle to the creation of additional funding of £5 million of capital and £250,000 of revenue, subject to the appropriate Cabinet approvals and budgetary processes.
- 8.2 The £250,000 revenue funding was made available immediately and has been used to fund additional gully and drain cleaning across the county. This recognised that many assets which were clear at the start of the winter became blocked by soil and detritus washed from roads and surrounding land during the prolonged and intense rainfall events.
- 8.3 This report therefore asks Cabinet to formally allocate a capital budget of £5 million for flooding resilience measures. The proposed allocation will support the implementation of actions arising from Section 19 flood investigations, Strategic Flood Investigations and Community Flood Reviews, alongside complementary flood recovery activity.
- 8.4 In addition to this proposed capital allocation, the wider £9.25 million programme referenced in this report comprises:

- approximately £3.6 million from existing Dorset Council revenue budgets and Department for Transport funding to address flooding-related highway maintenance and recovery; and
- up to £400,000 drawn from the Council's Severe Weather Reserve to fund Section 19 flood investigations and community-based reviews, noting that the costs of investigations cannot be capitalised.

8.5 Subject to Cabinet approval of the capital allocation, this report also proposes that authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Regeneration, Infrastructure and Growth, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Place Services and the Section 151 Officer, to authorise expenditure from the £5 million capital budget. Any individual scheme with a value exceeding £500,000 will be reported to Cabinet for further specific approval.

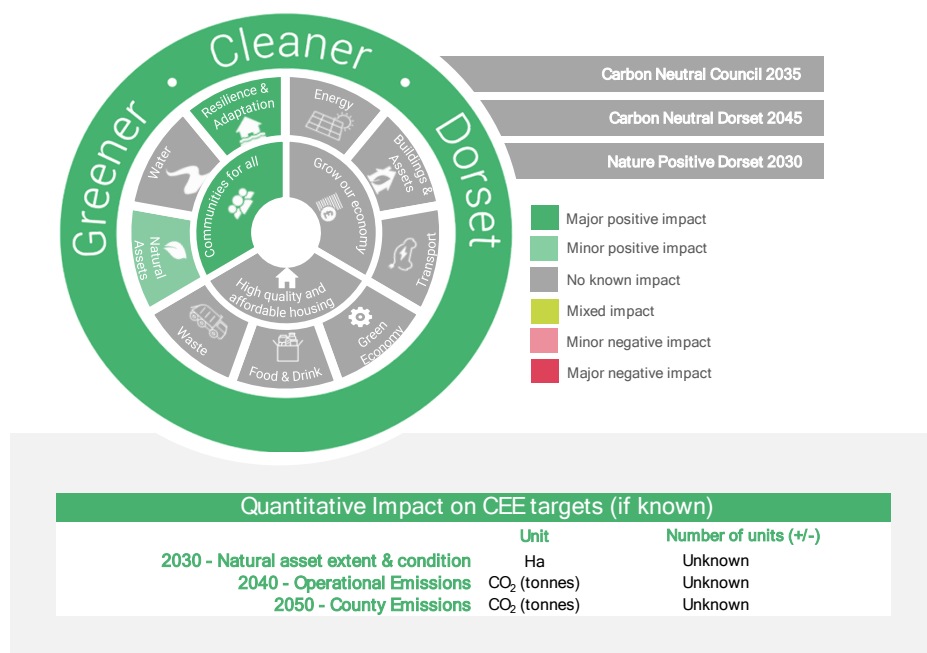
8.6 This approach ensures that flood resilience funding is applied in a controlled, transparent and evidence-led manner, aligned to statutory flood investigations and local priorities, while retaining appropriate financial and democratic oversight.

8.7 Table 1, Cost Summary

Immediate response and reactive maintenance (from existing budget) £	Additional Gully Emptying £	Flooding Related Road Maintenance (DfT Funded) £	Dorset Council Additional Flooding Resilience Capital £	Section 19 Investigations £	Total £
800k	250k	2.8m	5m	400k	9.25m

9. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

9.1 The programme supports climate adaptation, a clear priority area for the council, by improving the county's resilience to more intense rainfall and surface water flooding. Locality reports will include nature-based and catchment-based options where feasible (e.g., leaky barriers, floodplain reconnection, wetland creation), alongside maintenance and property-level measures. Designs will seek multiple benefits for biodiversity and water quality where appropriate.



10. Well-being and health implications

- 10.1 Flooding to property carries long-term mental and physical wellbeing challenges. Through this programme of work and empowerment of communities, we will be able to reduce the risk of flooding and increase community preparedness. This will benefit community health and well-being in the long term.

11. Other implications

- 11.1 None

12. Risk implications

- 12.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: High

Residual Risk: Medium

Some of the flooding experienced this year has been unprecedented. Severe flooding can isolate communities, impede connectivity and create immediate hazards that pose a threat to life. The action taken from this report will mitigate against the effects of future flooding and provide improved resilience,

although the risk remains significant as the trend for high impact severe weather events continues.

13. Equalities

- 13.1 A screening will be completed at programme launch and updated per locality. Engagement with communities will be inclusive and accessible. Specific attention will be paid to vulnerable groups including park home residents, and the Gypsy & Traveller community at Thornicombe.
- 13.2 All materials will be available in plain English, with alternative formats on request.

14. Appendices

- 14.1 Appendix A – List of investigation localities.
All flooding incidents listed have been considered under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010.

The categorisation shown reflects the proposed form of Section 19 investigation in each case.

Community (Parish)	Type of Investigation
Affpuddle and Turnerspuddle CP	Strategic Flood Investigation
Alderholt CP	Community Flood Review
Bere Regis CP	Community Flood Review
Blandford Forum CP	Strategic Flood Investigation
Bridport CP	Community Flood Review
Cerne Abbas CP	Community Flood Review
Charlton Marshall CP	Community Flood Review
Charminster CP	Community Flood Review
Dorchester CP	Community Flood Review

Ferndown Town CP	Community Flood Review
Frome Vauchurch CP	Community Flood Review
Godmanstone CP	Community Flood Review
Iwerne Courtney or Shroton CP	Strategic Flood Investigation
Milborne St Andrew	Community Flood Review
Moreton CP	Community Flood Review
Mosterton CP	Community Flood Review
Piddlehinton/Piddletrenthide	Community Flood Review
Pimperne CP	Community Flood Review
Puddletown CP	Community Flood Review
Shillingstone CP	Community Flood Review
Sixpenny Handley and Pentridge CP	Community Flood Review
Stourpaine CP	Community Flood Review
Sturminster Marshall CP	Strategic Flood Investigation
Swyre CP	Community Flood Review
Weymouth CP	Community Flood Review
Wimborne Minster CP	Community Flood Review
Winterborne Kingston CP	Strategic Flood Investigation
Winterborne Whitechurch	Community Flood Review
Bakers Arms Roundabout	Strategic Flood Investigation
A35 Winterbourne Abbas	Strategic Flood Investigation

Areas previously investigated that will not require new investigations:

Arne CP
Chideock CP
Motcombe CP

Portesham CP
Wareham Town CP
Winterborne Stickland CP
Winterborne Steepleton CP
Wool CP

14.2 Appendix B – Climate Wheel outputs

Energy	No known impact
Buildings & Assets	No known impact
Transport	No known impact
Green Economy	No known impact
Food & Drink	No known impact
Waste	No known impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	Minor positive impact
Water	No known impact
Resilience and Adaptation	Major positive impact
Council Plan Priorities	Impact
High quality & affordable housing	No known impact
Grow our economy	No known impact
Communities for all	Major positive impact
Climate and nature crisis	Major positive impact

14.3 Appendix C – Environment Agency Drop In Event Leaflet



The poster is for a 'Community Drop In' event. At the top, it features logos for the Environment Agency, Dorset Council, and Wessex Water (YTL Group). The main title 'Community Drop In' is in a large, bold font. Below the title, the text explains the purpose: to understand the impacts of recent flood events on homes and businesses. It encourages participation to share experiences and learn about support available. A list of dates and locations for the drop-in sessions is provided, ranging from April to June. A contact email for more information or registration is also listed. The bottom of the poster features a stylized illustration of houses on a hill with a blue wavy line representing water in the foreground.

Environment Agency **Dorset Council** **Wessex Water**
YTL GROUP

Community Drop In

We understand that homes and businesses in your community may have been recently affected by flooding.

Join us to share your experience of the recent flood events so we can better understand the impacts of flooding in your community.

Speak to the Environment Agency, Dorset Council, Wessex Water and partners to understand what support might be available.

Find out how you and your community can be better prepared and build resilience through the Flood Warning Service, preparing flood plans and Property Flood Resilience (PFR) measures.

For additional information and advice:
<https://engageenvironmentagency.uk.engagementhq.com/dorset-and-wiltshire-groundwater-incident-response-2026>

Join us from 3-7pm at any one of our hub locations:

- 21 April** - Weymouth: The Palm House, DT4 7TZ
- 23 April** - Blandford: Pimperne Village Hall, DT11 8UZ
- 14 May** - Winterborne Stickland: Pamela Hambro Hall, DT11 ONT
- 21 May** - Sydling St Nicholas Village Hall, DT2 9NX
- 4 June** - Dorchester: Stratton Village Hall, DT2 9WG

For more information or to register your interest please email:
floodwessex@environment-agency.gov.uk

15. Background papers

15.1 None

16. Report sign-off

16.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)

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