

Networks for Flood Risk Management

Summary

1. This paper sets out a proposal for a formal Inland Flood Risk Management Group, with Environment Board representation.

Recommendations

1. To agree to the setting up of the Group
2. To agree Board representation and the process for nominating Executive members

Action

Officers will take forward the Board's recommendations.

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Networks for Flood Risk Management

Background

1. From conversations with various local authorities, there is a clear desire for a formal grouping of local authorities on managing local flood risk. There is a new lead role for local authorities (which LGA support) proposed by the Pitt Report into the summer 2007 floods and formalised through a Flood and Water Management Bill to be introduced this November. All unitaries and county areas will have the responsibility for managing local flood risk. This will involve a major learning curve for many areas, political priority to ensure the role is supported, significant additional work, more skilled staff and strategic partnership working locally with Environment Agency, water companies etc. There is now a huge challenge for authorities to get to grips with the lead role.
2. 3.8m properties are currently at risk of surface water flooding with 490k properties at high risk. Scenarios suggest that spending on flood risk needs to double by 2035 just to stop this number rising, so this will be an ongoing challenge and cost for local authorities (EA National Flood Risk Assessment July 09).
3. There is a Coastal Special Interest Group, which looks at coastal erosion and flooding issues as one of many coastal issues, but no corresponding LGA supported group on local or inland flood risk.
4. A formal request that the LGA set up a SIG on inland flood risk was sent to the LGA in October by Lincolnshire, on behalf of 14 local authorities. As a result of this request a meeting was held with officers from Lincolnshire and Gloucestershire and LGA and IDeA policy staff, to discuss the request and decide whether a SIG was the best mechanism for achieving the support and profile desired on this issue. As a result of that discussion, it was agreed that a formal group, with a clear link to the LGA Environment Board, should effectively achieve the support and profile for this issue. As inland flooding is potentially an issue for all local authorities, rather than a special interest for a group of authorities, it was agreed that a formal LGA Group, rather than a SIG was the best solution.

A formal Inland Flood Risk Management Group

5. A formal group would provide the structure for effective communication both between members and with government, EA and the water industry. There are big funding and skills issues to be addressed if councils are to manage this role effectively and there will be a lot of expectation on councils from the community to actually reduce flood risk. Consequently, it is important that councils taking on this role have an effective framework and a recognised LGA Group profile for them to discuss issues, lobby government and together address the common challenges that they are facing on flood risk.

6. A formal group would also enable authorities (members and officers) to communicate and support each other over the short term, with implementing the Pitt recommendations on Flood Risk and the Floods Bill, as well as over the medium and long term as the lead role is established and the projected risk of inland flooding rises with climate change impacts and population growth.

Aims of an Inland Flood Risk Group

7. The aim of an Inland Flood Risk Group is to achieve:
 - A voice for local government on inland flood risk management;
 - A structure for member and officer discussion about flooding issues;
 - Progress in effectively undertaking the new lead role;
 - A credible forum for Government/EA and others to work with;
 - A formal link to the LGA Group and Environment Board;
 - Officer and member groups with objectives for each.
8. Such a Group would:
 - Build on learning alliances and partnerships that some authorities are involved in;
 - Ensure county, unitary and district representation and enable all, even small authorities, to be heard and contribute to the agenda;
 - Facilitate focused discussion and support to deliver Pitt recommendations and Floods Bill powers.

Proposed Form of Inland Flood Risk Management Group

9. Board members are asked to comment on the following proposed structure for Member and Officer representation on the Flood Risk Group, frequency of meetings and LGA Group liaison and support.
10. A Member Executive, comprising representatives from the Environment Board and representatives from each of the regions, would agree the Terms of Reference and work plan for the Flood Risk Group. LGA Group policy support staff would organise meetings, LGA Group policy staff would attend meetings (probably 3-4 meetings pa) and help to support the work of the Flood Risk Group.
11. An Officer Group, linking to a wider network (potentially all local authorities) would also meet formally, support the Member Executive and ensure effective communication and learning across authorities. LGA Group policy staff could work with this Officer Group and wider network to help inform policy development and disseminate good practice through LGA Group resources (IDeA Knowledge case studies, Community of Practice etc).

12. It is proposed that Regional LGAs, RIEPs and Regional Flood Defence Committees may be the source of nominations for membership of the Executive. Members of the Executive should be at Cabinet level and membership should cover a broad spectrum of authority types, sizes, geography, rural and urban, as well as political control. Membership should include some authorities with recent experience of inland flooding. If Board members approve the setting up of the proposed Flood Risk Group, policy staff could then seek nominations from the organisations above. Members are asked to comment on this suggestion.

LGA Environment Board representation

13. It is proposed, subject to the agreement of the Board, that 4 Board members would sit on the Executive of the Group, to ensure a direct link to the Board and the credibility of the Flood Risk Group as the voice of local government on Inland Flood Risk, as well as to raise the profile of local/inland flood risk across all authorities.

Terms of Reference

14. It is proposed that formal ratification of the Group is left to office holders. Terms of Reference would be needed to clarify:
- Objectives;
 - Relationships with other organisations;
 - Deliverables: First Year; Subsequent years;
 - Meetings;
 - Annual Report.

Financial Implications

15. There would be some meeting costs associated with establishing a new LGA convened Group. Policy staff would be involved in liaison and support of the Flood Risk Group, but there would be clear benefits across the LGA Group in terms of informing policy development, sharing good practice, supporting improvement and having access to a network of experts on inland flood risk.

Implications for Wales

16. The forthcoming Flood and Water Management Bill will apply to Wales and it is important that Wales is represented on the Group.

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