

Resources for Infrastructure Damage from Floods

Summary

This report provides a summary of the actions taken to date by the LGA on securing further resources and support for structural damage to local highways infrastructure following recent heavy rainfall and floods. Members are asked for direction on future action.

Recommendations

That the Board:

1. Notes the concerns of affected councils and actions taken to date by the LGA
2. Debates and agrees options for further action
3. Asks the Inland Flood Risk Management Group to follow up and to report back to the Board with any recommended further action.

Action

As directed by the Board.

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Background

1. Summer 2012 has been one of the wettest summers on record. In many places this summer's rainfall has resulted in serious flooding and costs to councils. LGA officials and the Chair of the Inland Flood Risk Management Group, Cllr Andrew Cooper, have been in regular contact at official and member level with member councils to offer LGA assistance as necessary.
2. Whilst councils' immediate concerns were with managing the flow of water and ensuring the safety of their communities, their next priority was with making good the damage caused by the heavy rainfall and subsequent flooding. Reports from around the country highlighted not only the immediate challenges of managing emergency situations, but also of the emerging structural damage that would prevent workers, residents and local enterprises going about their usual business, as well as presenting councils with substantial repair bills.

The issues and actions to date

3. On 10 July, the Government activated the Bellwin scheme, which is set up to provide emergency financial assistance to local authorities that incur expenditure on, or in connection with, the taking of immediate action to safeguard life or property, or to prevent suffering or severe inconvenience, in their area or among its inhabitants following an emergency or disaster.
4. Following successful LGA lobbying, the Government increased their funding (above initial local contributions) to 100%. However, many places have suffered from significant and structural highways damage, running into millions of pounds to fix, which the Bellwin scheme does not cover. Councils will have to use money on urgent repairs that was previously earmarked for infrastructure improvements for the local economy. Initial estimates from Newcastle, Devon and Northumberland, for example, indicate costs of £9million, £2million and £1.4million respectively. These are likely to rise as the extent of the damage is uncovered through further council investigation.
5. On 18 July, the Chairman of the LGA wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport, outlining the limitations of the Bellwin Scheme in providing funding for capital repairs and suggesting that the Department for Transport (DfT) consider reintroducing a similar scheme to the Emergency Capital Highway Maintenance Fund set up following the floods in 2007. This proved extremely helpful at the time in supporting local communities and local economies recover as quickly as possible.
6. The Secretary of State for Transport responded by stating that the DfT does not have a specific fund for capital expenditure for exceptional requests for flood damage. This is of course true, but the response failed to engage with the case made by the LGA in support of establishing one. However, in the interests of national and local priority to support investment in growth and jobs the LGA is seeking to continue to represent the interests of local authorities. Every pound spend on fixing roads and bridges damaged

18 September 2012

Item 3

by heavy rainfall and floods is a pound less that can be spent on infrastructure improvements and supporting growth.

Further action

7. Members may wish to consider the following options for continuing to pursue the interests of affected local authorities.
8. A number of affected councils have written to the Secretary of State for Communities, to highlight the inadequacies of the Bellwin scheme in supporting significant structural damage. The LGA could consider writing to the Secretary of State in support of affected councils.
9. The Board could ask the Inland Flood Risk Management Group to explore and to recommend options so that councils avoid a situation where they have to campaign on each occasion for funding from government to cover costs of exceptional flood damage to infrastructure. In undertaking this work, the Inland FRM Group may wish to consider:
 - 9.1 the feasibility of proposals that automatically trigger access to a special fund for such situations. For example, each time the government activate the Bellwin scheme, a similar scheme to the Emergency Capital Highways Maintenance Fund is also activated.
 - 9.2 identifying and pursuing possible sources of cost recovery, such as:
 - 9.2.1 those who may bear some responsibility in the integrity of the roads network – for example utility companies;
 - 9.2.2 those who have assets adjacent to road networks that may have contributed to the roads becoming weaker – for example through excessive drainage or poorly maintained/ mismanaged watercourses;
 - 9.2.3 agencies responsible for the infrastructure required to deal with flooding such as water utilities, internal drainage boards (IDBs) and the Environment Agency. Highways authorities also have responsibility for managing flood risk.

Recommendations and next steps

10. Members are asked to:
 - 10.1 Note the concerns of affected councils and actions taken to date by the LGA;
 - 10.2 Debate and agree options for further action;
 - 10.3 Ask the Inland Flood Risk Management Group to scope and report back to the Board with any recommended further action.