

Achievements and work programme of the Inland Flood Risk Management Group

Purpose

To present the key achievements of the Inland Flood Risk Management Group's work over the last 12 months and proposed key areas of focus for its work over the coming year.

Summary

As requested by the last meeting of the Environment and Housing Board, this report provides a summary of the achievements of the Group's work in relation to flood risk management and associated issues and outlines key areas of focus for the coming year.

Recommendations

That the Board:

1. **notes** the achievements of the Group's work over the last 12 months;
2. **endorses** the proposed key areas of focus for the coming year.

Action

As directed by the Board, officers will develop a work programme to support the deliverables identified and report these back to the Group, seeking further support from the Board as necessary.

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Focus of the LGA Inland Flood Risk Management Group's work and key objectives

Introduction

1. The LGA Inland Flood Risk Management Group was set up by the LGA's Environment and Housing Board in 2009 to support councils' transition to the new responsibilities placed on Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs) and to help the LGA to lead the agenda in representing council's flood related priorities and concerns.
2. Flooding is predicted to be the biggest climate risk to the UK and affects a growing number of communities each year. This presents significant challenges for councils, not least in dealing with unpredictable cost burdens in a highly constrained financial climate. It also presents a substantial reputational risk to councils who are under intense scrutiny on their ability to respond and assist. Recent flooding events have only too clearly highlighted some of these challenges and risks.
3. At the last Environment and Housing Board meeting, it was agreed that '**Flooding – managing flood risk and building resilience**' would be one of the four high-level areas of focus for the coming year. The Board agreed for the Inland Flood Risk Management Group to continue to lead on LGA floods work on its behalf and has asked the Group to report back on progress made in the previous year and set out its areas of focus and objectives for the year ahead, for the Board's endorsement. The Board agreed it would also be useful for the Group to report back to the Board at each meeting on progress to enable the Board to add weight on key lobbying issues.

Achievements of the Inland Flood Risk Management Group over the previous year

4. The achievements below have been grouped broadly into three main topic areas – **funding and resources; capacity building and tackling insurance issues**.

Funding and Resources

5. Following successful LGA lobbying, the Government increased their offer of emergency funding to councils affected by this summer's flooding (via the Bellwin scheme) to 100% (above initial local contributions).
6. Following significant structural highways damage from this summer's floods - the LGA wrote to both DCLG and DfT urging them to change the rules concerning emergency financial support so that they allow councils to automatically claim for such capital costs.
7. In the run up to the enactment of the Floods and Water Management Bill 2010, Defra and the LGA had set up an officer level panel to review funding and capacity requirements specifically relating to LLFAs. A recent survey of council resources and capacity showed that councils were adequately undertaking their new responsibilities. The work of the Panel is now complete.

8. The Group collected evidence from councils and responded to the Government's consultation on Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) provisions, highlighting concerns on timing of implementation on long-term funding of SUDs maintenance. Following LGA lobbying, councils were at least provided some clarity at the recent Inland FRM Group's open event that the SUDs regulations will not be able to commence in April 2013 as anticipated by many councils.

Capacity Building

9. As part of the support package to local authorities, a one-stop shop (www.local.gov.uk/floodportal) for all local flood risk management information, learning and networking was launched in June 2012. The 'FloWNet' community has now well over 1100 subscribers and is showing high levels of use.
10. October's annual floods event was well attended by more than 80 delegates with an address by the Defra floods minister Richard Benyon. Local authority colleagues from Calderdale and West Sussex provided a timely reflection on the summer 2012 floods which affected their local areas.
11. The Group, via its officer network, has continued to support the Defra capacity building strategy. This has been developed in partnership with local authorities, the Local Government Association, Environment Agency, CIWEM (the Chartered Institute of Water and Environmental Management), DCLG and other partners. Through workshops and on-line resources, the capacity building programme is continuing to help LLFAs deliver better local flood risk management through skills development and learning.
12. The Group commissioned sector-led advice on 'Securing alternative sources of Funding for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management' and a 'Framework to assist the development of the Local Strategy for Flood Risk Management'. These provided local authorities with an early understanding of alternative sources of funding for defence schemes and guidance on the key local flood risk management issues that should be considered in the development of their own local strategy.

Tackling insurance issues

13. The Group raised councils' concerns with Government and the insurance industry on the importance and urgency of a new model for flood insurance. To support this work, the Group has:
 - 13.1 collected evidence relating to residents inability to obtain and/or afford flood insurance;
 - 13.2 written to the Association of British Insurers (ABI) and Defra Minister Richard Benyon;
 - 13.3 met with representatives from the ABI and Defra as well as having representation in a private meeting with the Defra Minister.

Areas of focus and objectives for the year ahead

14. In looking at the areas of focus for the year ahead, and in order to maximise impact, it is important that the work of the Inland Flood Risk Management Group is aligned to the overall strategic context facing local government and the priorities of member councils. This means issues relating to councils' flood risk roles need to be managed against a context in which local government is managing huge cuts in public spending and working hard on new ways to deliver services, and where the outlook for public spending tells us that more cuts are in the pipeline.
15. Councils are also concerned about the ability of local residents, businesses and local infrastructure to recover effectively from the impact of floods. Where this fails to happen, councils are very often left to pick up the pieces. Whether it is through support in temporary re-housing, or having to repair structurally damaged roads that are vital for the local economy, councils affected by flooding have to divert limited funds and resources away from other priorities.
16. It is against this narrative that the following work priorities have been proposed by the Group – many of which are existing priorities :
 - 16.1 **Funding for flood defences** – reports from a number of areas suggest that the new Partnership Funding mechanism is geared toward the protection of people and property but does not necessarily protect places with low land values, businesses and some rural and coastal areas. The LGA proposes to:
 - 16.1.1 Gather evidence on how well Partnership Funding model is helping local priorities
 - 16.1.2 Continue to press Defra for better models for allocating funding
 - 16.2 **Accessible and affordable floods insurance.** The LGA proposes to continue to apply pressure on both Government and the insurance industry to deliver a new system of floods insurance, and playing a full and responsible role in protecting communities during the transition period.
 - 16.3 **Infrastructure damage.** As important as the need to help households recover, is the need to ensure that highways are reinstated from structural damage caused from floods. In response to the LGA's call for further support, the Government have said that there are no additional resources to support affected areas (see the letter from Norman Baker MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport at [Appendix 4a](#)). It is proposed that the Inland FRM Group leads on investigating other avenues which could help avoid a regular request of support from central government each time a major flooding incident causes infrastructure damage. This will entail establishing how owners of infrastructure and key assets, such as land, and those responsible for managing flood risk, can work better together to improve resilience of infrastructure and minimise the risk of future structural damage.
 - 16.4 **Council resources and capacity.** The Inland FRM Group should continue to play a supportive role in promoting the sharing of good practice, intelligence and lessons in flood risk management, whilst ensuring that Defra's capacity building

programme is properly tailored for the needs of councils. To this end, LGA officers are working with Defra officials to ensure that the delivery of capacity support is council-led.

- 16.5 **Sustainable Drainage Systems.** The lack of clarity and delay to the introduction of Sustainable Drainage System (SUDs) regulations and the role of the SUDs Approval Bodies (SABs) continues to frustrate councils. Whilst Defra have confirmed that the SUDs regulation will not commence on 1st April as widely anticipated, it is proposed the LGA should continue to press Government for clarity on when they will be introduced (so that councils can secure budgets and resources accordingly). The LGA should also continue to press Government on the long-term funding model for maintenance of SUDs.

Recommendations

17. Members are invited to:
- 17.1 Note the achievements of the Inland Flood Risk Management Group's work over the last 12 months;
 - 17.2 Comment on, and subject to these comments, endorse the proposed key areas of focus for the coming year.

Action

18. As directed by the Board, officers will develop a work programme to support the deliverables identified and report these back to the Group, seeking further support from the Board as necessary.