

Review of flooding

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

This paper summarises the content of CFOA's *National flood events 2014 operational debrief* report; provides a summary of the work that the LGA is currently undertaking on flooding and notes a forthcoming gap analysis of flood assets that is being undertaken by DCLG/Defra.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the content of the CFOA report and to consider the LGA's role in supporting its recommendations.

Action

Officers will take action as directed by members.

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Background

1. From December 2013 through to February 2014, Britain experienced a series of extreme weather events. A tidal surge affecting the east coast of England in early December 2013 was the largest in 60 years; rainfall for December 2013 to February 2014 was measured at 500mm, the highest recorded for 100 years and around 6 major storms hit the South and South West of England during January and February 2014. Overall, the period from mid-December 2013 to mid-February 2014 saw at least 12 major winter storms and this was the stormiest period of weather the UK has experienced for at least 20 years.
2. As a result of this, there was serious wide area and coastal flooding across many different parts of the South of England, including Cornwall, the Somerset Levels, the Thames Valley, London and Kent. It has been estimated that more than 7,000 homes were flooded with many more suffering the effects of restricted access due to widespread transport disruption, impassable routes and unusable services due to flooding affecting local infrastructure.

FRS response

3. On 24 January 2014, Somerset County Council declared the ongoing flooding on the Somerset Levels as a 'major incident', and the subsequent succession of storm fronts meant that within a matter of days further mutual aid support was being requested by FRSs in Cornwall, Buckinghamshire, Dorset, Hampshire, London, Oxfordshire, Royal Berkshire, Surrey and Hereford and Worcestershire.
4. The National Resilience Assurance Team (NRAT) enacted its operational role as defined within the National Coordination and Advisory Framework, providing support to incident locations including:
 - 4.1 Information, advice and support to the National Strategic Advisory Team (NSAT) role
 - 4.2 Information, advice and support to the Fire and Rescue Service National Co-ordination Centre (FRSNCC)
 - 4.3 Information, advice and support to the Silver Command function in Devon and Somerset, Royal Berkshire and Surrey
 - 4.4 Liaison, co-ordination and capability advice to support activities at the Bronze operational level
 - 4.5 Enhanced Logistics Support Officers (ELSOs) to manage Strategic Holding Areas (SHAs) in Devon and Somerset, Royal Berkshire and Surrey.
5. Additionally, an NRAT Operations Support Cell led by the National Resilience Officer was established at the National Resilience Centre, Fire Service College, in order to provide a focal point for the central co-ordination of information and support to the DCLG Operations Cell, the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser (CFRA), the NRAT, and the NRAT Duty Officer.

Evaluation of the FRS response

6. As the flooding subsided and resources were stood down, CFOA sought the views of various stakeholders including DCLG, CFRA, FRS, NRAT, Met Office, and Defra, on the FRS response, with a particular focus on issues that only affect a national mutual aid type of response for flooding and the associated NCAF arrangements. Responses have been group into the following six areas:
 - 6.1 NCAF arrangements
 - 6.2 Mutual aid
 - 6.3 Mobilising and receiving
 - 6.4 Communications
 - 6.5 Welfare
 - 6.6 Views of partner agencies and affected FRS on the national response
7. Altogether the report (which can be found here: <http://www.cfoa.org.uk/17962>) makes 44 recommendations which are grouped under the following headings:
 - 7.1 NCAF arrangements
 - 7.2 Mutual aid
 - 7.3 Mobilising and receiving arrangements
 - 7.4 Communications
 - 7.5 Welfare
 - 7.6 Views of partner agencies and affected FRS on the national response
8. A selection of the key recommendations are as follows:
 - 8.1 That a methodology for access to centralised funding mechanisms that are clearly understood by all stakeholders is provided, thus ensuring requests for support are anticipated, received at the earliest opportunity, and acted upon in a timely manner.
 - 8.2 Affected FRSs should base requests for specialised assets or vehicles upon the desired effect or capability required rather than detailing a specific type of vehicle with which certain FRSs may not be familiar.
 - 8.3 When providing national mutual aid, all supporting FRSs should promptly notify the affected FRS of the exact number of personnel accompanying their supporting asset(s) in order to support the facilitation of appropriate and timely logistical/welfare arrangements.
 - 8.4 Affected FRS should make greater use of Airwave radio channels available to them in order to facilitate continuity in communications between various functions/locations.
 - 8.5 All FRSs should be reminded of their responsibility as a 'receiving' service in terms of the provision of suitable welfare arrangements for supporting crews, and ensure that they have sufficient cover in place to facilitate such provision particularly during periods considered to be outside of normal office hours.
 - 8.6 All flood response stakeholders (to include voluntary sector partners) should continue to develop multi-agency training and exercising at the local level to

facilitate a greater understanding of roles and responsibilities that may be employed during an emergency response.

9. The Committee should note that the recommendations listed in the report do not make reference to the issue of a statutory responsibility for flooding, an issue on which the LGA and CFOA do not agree, but this is down to the operational focus of the report.
10. The Committee is asked to consider whether the LGA should work with CFOA to promote the recommendations that are made in the report and to suggest how this could be best achieved.

Wider learning on flooding

11. The Environment and Housing Board agreed that LGA activity on flooding should focus on efforts to evidence the financial impact on councils, lobbying for funding to cover the costs of damage to infrastructure and reform of the Bellwin Scheme.
12. The LGA has been represented on the Severe Weather Ministerial Recovery Group by Cllr Mike Jones. Meetings of this group have are chaired by Eric Pickles MP and take place on a fortnightly basis. Key issues dealt with include ensuring effective roll-out of the government support schemes; support to councils needing further help with inspection of damaged assets and assessment of the extent to which funding allocation for roads and flood/coastal defences aligns with need. Councillor Jones has also used these meetings to stress the need for a simplified framework for recovery for future events. This proposal has been well received by Ministers from across government departments.
13. The government is undertaking a number of wider reviews to inform its response and further activity to prevent and respond to future severe weather incidents. This includes:
 - 13.1 A review of the Bellwin scheme to consider whether the arrangements for providing funding to compensate local authorities for the costs of emergency measures are fit for purpose. We expect CLG to issue a consultation on this matter shortly.
 - 13.2 A review of the resilience of the transport network to extreme weather events was undertaken and the appointed expert panel published their report on 22 July. The LGA inputted into this review and highlighted the urgent need to return the local roads network to a reasonable condition by finding a long term funding solution and a simplified framework for emergency funds following severe weather events – this latter point was a recommendation of the transport resilience review expert panel. The Government is expected to respond in Autumn this year.
 - 13.3 A review of investment decision guidelines on flood defences.
 - 13.4 An annual resilience review to consider the local, regional and national response to extreme weather situations and make recommendations for the government's long and short term resilience strategy.
14. The LGA actively supported the councils affected, by securing significant media coverage on the ways in which they were assisting their communities securing, ensuring councils'

concerns were raised with Ministers and pressing the case for additional funding to cover the cost of the emergency response.

- 15 The Government responded to our calls for additional funding by committing an additional £270 million for flood defences over the next three years, £184 million for road repairs and £135.25 million in other recovery funding schemes for councils, communities and businesses.
- 16 We are holding follow-up discussions with government officials to push for accessible systems for recovery support schemes to be put in place ahead of winter 2014. A simplified framework will make it easier for councils to disperse recovery funding quickly following future emergency incidents. Our proposals are that it could include a website with all the key messages/statements, information on funding streams available and standard claim forms, processes and templates.
- 17 The LGA has continued to engage with CLG to influence the government's review of the Bellwin Scheme, to ensure that it more effectively reflects the costs councils incur in emergency recovery. We expect the government's consultation on changes to Bellwin to be published during the autumn.

CLG gap analysis

- 18 The Department for Communities and Local Government (working with Defra and the Environment Agency) will be circulating a short survey to LRFs during September that will seek views on the availability of flood assets such as high volume pumps and barriers, with the aim of identifying any gaps and needs. The survey will also give LRFs the opportunity to request more assets from government. We expect the findings from the survey to be available to LRFs by the middle of October.

Financial implications

- 19 There are no specific additional financial implications for the LGA arising from this report.