

Flooding: Resilience and Response

Purpose

For discussion and direction.

Summary

With December 2015 being a record breaking month for rainfall in some parts of England and exceptional amounts of rain falling onto already saturated ground, councils have been at the forefront of activity to ensure communities are resilient and protected as far as possible.

Recommendation

That the Executive discuss the latest position and identify any new work.

Action

Officers will take actions forward as directed.

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Background

1. With the UK experiencing the wettest December in a century, with rain falling on already saturated ground, a number of areas are still on high alert in case of further downpours, at the same time as undertaking clean-up and recovery. Cumbria, Lancashire and Northumberland were the main areas to be badly hit by flooding in early December, spreading across other parts of Yorkshire over the Christmas and New Year break. Whilst overall the weather situation has now improved, there is a risk that any further heavy rain falling on wet ground could lead to more flooding over the coming weeks.
2. The Environment Agency issued almost 1200 flood warnings in December 2015, with 89 at the highest level, meaning danger to life and more than 250 warnings have already been issued in 2016 (to 5 January). In excess of 16,000 homes and businesses were flooded. Tens of thousands of properties were also without electricity, including 55,000 at one point in Lancaster alone. However, whilst no consolation to those who were inundated, flood defences protected over 20,000 properties. Alongside councils working with the local emergency services, the Environment Agency and the voluntary sector and other partners, 600 military personnel were also deployed to support operations, with a further 1,000 on standby. Fire and rescue services from across the country also provided additional assistance to affected areas.

Funding for flood defences and local authority role in flood risk management

3. The Flood and Water Management Act 2010 implemented the recommendations from the 2007 Pitt Review and placed a series of new responsibilities on Lead Local Flood Authorities or LLFAs (county councils and single-tier councils). LLFAs have a 'lead' role in managing flood risk from surface water, groundwater and ordinary watercourses (non main-rivers), working closely with other partners involved in flood and water management.
4. Main duties include: putting in place a local flood risk management strategy (as of December 2015, 78% of LLFAs had published or consulted on their strategy); cooperation with other risk management authorities including district and borough councils (in two-tier areas), water and sewerage companies, the Environment Agency and others; maintaining a register of local structures and features likely to have a significant effect on flood risk; investigation following significant flood events; a statutory consultee to the planning process on the management of surface water for new major developments.
5. The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (EFRA) published the 2014-15 DEFRA performance report last month. On flooding, DEFRA has committed to a six-year programme of capital investment of £2.3 billion to improve defences up to 2021 (and just over £1.9 billion by 2019/20). This is a real-terms increase on investment in the previous Parliament. To enable delivery this requires an additional £600 million of 'partnership' contributions. £250 million has been identified so far (£190 million from local authorities and £60 million from the private sector). The LGA is seeking further clarity around the subsequent revenue funding which will be necessary to cover the day-to-day costs of these projects.

6. Last year the Government responded to LGA calls to introduce tax relief for businesses contributing to flood defence projects. However, businesses can only get tax relief if the Environment Agency has allocated funding by way of grant-in-aid to the project. Entirely privately funded flood defence projects are not eligible for this tax relief. We have been calling on the government to broaden the scope to enable tax relief for all flood defence projects and further promote the relief available.
7. The LGA has also been calling for capital and revenue (maintenance) funding for flood and coastal risk management to be devolved into a local place-based 'pot' to increase flexibility on how the money is spent and allow local areas to support a more diverse set of outcomes to meet local priorities. The existing model tends to mean smaller, more rural and dispersed areas are unable to compete for funding. Other areas have catchments that are characterised by industry, commerce and critical infrastructure, yet little residential accommodation and so national funding contributions through Flood Defence Grant in Aid (FDGiA) for such areas are very low. A number of devolution bids have also called for additional powers over funding for flood risk management.

Local government and fire and rescue response

8. Councils have been at the forefront of activity ahead of, during and after flooding to support their residents and businesses including monitoring forecasts and keeping residents informed through regular postings on their websites and via social media. Teams were involved in clearing roadside drains and gullies to alleviate the risk of road flooding, managing road closures, supporting rescue of stranded motorists as well as assessment of damages to local transport infrastructure. Emergency rest centres and emergency accommodation were set up for families evacuated from their homes and plans were put in place to ensure other vulnerable and elderly residents were not put at risk and could still access the necessary council services. Skips to remove flood-damaged goods and other debris have been provided as well as other equipment to assist with recovery, including dehumidifiers, cleaning equipment and access to specific council-run hardship grants. Many staff were diverted from their normal duties and other placed on standby to work with emergency services and other partners as required to get help to where it was needed.
9. The Fire and Rescue Service has been working alongside councils in responding to the flooding. Firefighters from 24 fire and rescue services have been involved in rescuing hundreds of people across the affected areas. In addition to the traditional response in fire engines, firefighters in water rescue boats and operating specialist high volume pumps have worked around the clock to protect life and property in often very challenging conditions.

LGA response

10. Our strategy to date has focused on highlighting the continued work of councils and councillors working with the fire and rescue service, the military, the police, the voluntary sector and many other partners on the ground to protect people and property. The role of councils has been widely commended by national politicians and the widespread community spirit in order to help neighbours has been widely welcomed.

11. The LGA has also been liaising with the national media on a daily basis to highlight the work councils have been doing on behalf of their communities both ahead of bad weather, but also in dealing with the immediate response and subsequent clear-up.
12. We have also been working closely with councils affected to ensure that information for residents on their websites is clearly accessible. This has included updating and circulating LGA guidance on communicating with residents during extreme weather. Our flood resource on the LGA website has also been updated daily so that our member authorities can find all the information they need in one place: www.local.gov.uk/flood-resilience . This contains sections on funding, case studies about council activity, a number of press notices and access to other useful information including live flood alerts.
13. We set up a dedicated response and recovery team and in particular have been working behind the scenes to help councils deal with their immediate challenges. For example assisting local authorities with their requests for sourcing sandbags to shore up flood defences to minimise flooding in a number of areas.
14. In addition, we have continued to press our lines on winter preparedness and flooding with DCLG, Treasury and Defra Ministers at the end of last year, and will continue to do so in the coming weeks and months.
15. We are running three regional workshops in February 2016 on managing severe weather outbreak and other emergencies.

Additional Funding

16. There have been multiple announcements about additional funding for local areas, summarised below (as of 12 January). In particular, previous LGA lobbying has meant that capital funding has been made available to repair roads and bridges and small steps have been taken to introduce a more streamlined recovery package for Communities and Businesses. The package is essentially the same as that offered following the Winter 2013/14 floods.

Scheme	Amount
Storm Desmond	
Communities and Business Recovery Scheme Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - up to £500 per household - up to £2500 for businesses - up to £5000 per property for resilience measures - council tax discounts - business rates relief - farming recovery fund (£500-£20,000 per farm) 	£42.85 million
Cumbria and Lancashire – assessment of damage to roads and bridges	£2 million
Repairs to roads and bridges	£40 million
Repair to flood defences	£10 million

Charity match funding	up to £1 million
<u>Storm Eva</u>	
Communities and Business Recovery Scheme Includes: - up to £500 per household - up to £2500 for businesses - up to £5000 per property for resilience measures - council tax discounts - business rates relief - farming recovery fund (£500-£20,000 per farm)	£50 million
Repair to flood defences	£40 million
Charity match funding	up to £1m
Repairs to roads and bridges	£3.5 million
<u>Storm Eva and Desmond other</u>	
Sport England fund	£400,000
Bellwin scheme	100% of eligible costs above threshold

17. Since the announcements, we have been working closely with central Government on the details of the schemes, particularly the Communities and Business Recovery Scheme, many elements of which have been passed on to councils to administer. In particular we have pushed for a firm commitment that councils will be fully reimbursed for all of the schemes, in order to provide reassurance that there will be no further shortfall in their budgets. This has meant that councils have been able to promptly start to process requests from residents and businesses.

18. We are working with affected councils to ascertain the likely costs of repair of the infrastructure in their area. As soon as these figures become clearer, we will be able to make an assessment of whether the overall funding provided by the government is of the right magnitude.

Ongoing issues and next steps

19. The national co-ordination mechanism (COBR) is essentially a command and control operation and Ministers have asked for reassurance on a number of issues and services which local authorities run. This includes concerns about: continuity of provision of social care to vulnerable people; emergency and out of hours telephone numbers being sufficiently visible and active on websites and levels of mutual aid. Our approach has been consistently to remind central Government that responding to communities is the day job for councils and that, although provision will be different across the country, we can be confident that councils are continuing to provide the required services.

20. Whilst the LGA has not been formally involved in COBR in relation to the flooding, we have agreed to work with DCLG to put together a protocol on how LGA mutual aid arrangements regarding sandbags (and other resources) can be actioned following future emergencies.

21 January 2016

21. Whilst the support and high levels of engagement from government has been mostly welcomed by councils, ministerial oversight of both response and recovery in affected areas has been exceptionally rigorous. Concerns have been raised that this has engaged valuable resources and that councils must be allowed to get on with planning for and undertaking recovery following an emergency event.
22. The Government has charged Oliver Letwin MP with carrying out a National Flood Resilience review to protect the country better from future flooding and increasingly extreme weather events. This is due to report in Summer 2016. The LGA will seek opportunities to feed into this review.
23. Members may wish to comment on the LGA's role in the debate on the future flood strategy for England going forward. For example, should there be a stronger focus on the role of farming and upland management as well as the role of the planning system being played into how we prepare for floods in the future.
24. In addition, members may wish to consider whether the LGA should consult member authorities on the appropriate balance between investing in flood defences versus environmental management approaches to managing flood risk. For example, in the Netherlands, billions of pounds are being invested in an approach to flood risk management which marries the best of their engineering expertise with more flexible management of flood waters.