

Communities & Environment Policy Scrutiny Committee

15th March 2016

York Floods Update

FLOODED PROPERTIES

The floods of December 2015, the worst since 1982 in terms of impact on the City, resulted in the internal flooding of 627 properties (453 residential and 174 commercial). In the case of 1 residential property and 21 commercial properties this was the second time in approx. 1 month that they had suffered as they were affected by both Storms Desmond and Eva.

More than 900 properties have been visited by council officers in the aftermath of the flooding and where flooding has been confirmed the suite of grants made available by Government has been applied. £189k has been paid automatically via council tax payment accounts. 764 Council tax exemptions have also been granted totalling more than £267k.

The application process for businesses was administered by 'Make it York'. 90 businesses have successfully applied for the grants totalling £180k. Business rate relief exemptions totalling more than £1.15M have also been made to date.

The Property Level Resilience Grant scheme has been developed by DCLG and Defra, which will provide up to £5k to homes or businesses to make their property more resilient or resistant to future flooding. Works to make properties easier to recover – installing hard floors, raising electrics, and resilient wall finishes etc. deliver resilience and the installation of flood proof doors or barriers, air brick covers and other such measures can make a property more resistant to flooding.

14 applications for this grant have so far been approved; totalling more than £63k in grant funding, however, this is a highly technical process and involves a range of internal officers across several departments to be administered. Close working is also required with insurers, loss adjusters and contractors.

We are also working closely with the Two Ridings Community Foundation in their administration of the York Disaster Fund and they have also joint funded a caseworker to aid the delivery of the flood grant process.

City of York as a Lead Local Flood Authority have carried out a range of investigations into flooded properties and businesses across the city, advice and help has been provided to a range of property owners. Blockage removal, asset repair and clean up of a wide range of ditches and streams have been carried out and close working has been required with the Environment Agency, Internal Drainage Boards and Yorkshire Water. These works will provide a wide range of inputs for the independent inquiry which will deliver the investigation requirements of Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act (2010).

INFRASTRUCTURE

Several critical pieces of infrastructure were affected by the floods. The **Foss Barrier** is the most obvious. This is back in operation but work is required to maintain and improve it. It was under review at the time of the flooding but detailed upgrade plans are not yet in place. £10M additional Government funding has been committed to work on the barrier and we are working closely with the Environment Agency on their plans.

The **flood defences** through the City were not breached. However the river levels were only 200mm below the top of them for the 2nd time in 4 years.

We are working closely with the Environment Agency on a joint study via Defra Flood Defence Grant in Aid funding to identify the long term interventions that are needed to provide flood protection in the city. The York Flood Plan builds on the latest flood modelling that is currently being finalised and will look at the improvements that are needed to flood defence assets in the city and the actions that can be taken across the wider catchment to manage future climatic change. The outputs of the study will develop the long term investment plan for flood risk measures in the city and will be a key output to support the independent review.

Castle Mills Sewage Pumping Station failed in the face of the floods from the Foss basin. A significant proportion of the city's sewage is managed by this station. Whilst it is back in operation Yorkshire Water are drawing up long term plans to increase its resilience, we will support them in the delivery of this work wherever possible.

The **BT Telephone Exchange** in Garden Place was severely affected by the flooding of the Foss resulting in large parts of the City losing both telephone (landline and mobile) and data coverage for up to 24 hours. The responsibility for the defence of major utility infrastructure sits with the utility companies, however as the Lead Local Flood Authority we have made representations to all utility providers following the floods to ensure they consider their resilience plans.

THE RESPONSE

With the advent of the Civil Contingencies Act, the local authority's role in emergencies became one which is much more proactive. During events such as these the council moves very rapidly from being a mainly 'office hours only' organisation to needing to be much more a 24/7 organisation.

The response of colleagues across the council on a Bank Holiday weekend was gratifying.

- Hazel Court colleagues reported for duty on Boxing Day night and worked long hours to render assistance.
- Customer Service colleagues formed a 24hr rota to ensure residents were able to get the information and assistance they needed and offers of help were directed to those able to deal with them.
- Major Incident Response Team volunteers staffed a Rest Centre at Archbishop Holgate's School which offered shelter and support to up to 150 residents, some of them vulnerable.

Many colleagues found themselves thrust into roles outside of their day to day work. For instance,

- Collating and allocating offers of accommodation from generous members of the public, with all of the potential safeguarding issues that it raises.
- Managing the coordination of the many and varied donations of clothing, toys, food and cleaning equipment from finding storage locations to identifying and delivering those things to those who needed them.
- Constant delivery and monitoring of communications to ensure all communities were supported in the aftermath of flooding.
- There were also over 600 volunteers, both groups and individuals and from all over the country to manage and deploy (once again being mindful of potential safeguarding issues)

The learning from the experiences of those involved is being gathered and will be formed into guidance to be included in future iterations of the Council's Emergency Handbook.

As would be expected, the event has tested the Council's overall response to emergencies and several suggested changes to that response have been raised in debriefs of those involved. Some of these will undoubtedly be reflected in reviews of the Council's emergency plans and will be considered in the independent review process.

We have attended a wide range of flood meetings and surgery's led by the MP's and Ward Councillors and we have also delivered a range of drop in sessions in collaboration with the Environment Agency. All have given opportunities to provide support and information to affected communities and to gather important data on the ways in which the flooding affected people, we have also used the sessions to promote the range of support and grant packages that are available from CYC, Two Ridings Community Foundation and the support of the Major Incident Response Team.

Sandbags are often a touchstone for those in danger of flooding. Legally, the council has no responsibility to provide sandbags, indeed that is the policy of some local authorities. Nevertheless rather than seek their own solutions (many of which may be potentially better than sandbags) even people who know they live in a flood zone still rely on the council to provide them, often at the last minute. This obviously

creates strain on our resources at a busy time and is something that needs to be considered moving forward.

RECOVERY

A Recovery Group chaired by the Chief Executive was set up from Tuesday 29th December and started to scope out the issues that needed to be addressed to return the affected communities to normality as soon as possible, even as the response was ongoing.

The focus which this group brought to the recovery effort undoubtedly helped to maximise the impact that the activities it was directing had in the ongoing 'return to normality'.

A wide range of departments including Housing, Finance, Communications, Highways, Public Realm, Waste, Transport and Make it York have had their work steered by the recovery group, the group also received inputs from the military, the Environment Agency and DCLG.

Our recovery processes will also be reviewed in light of the event and this will form a key part of the independent review process.

We continue to work closely with DCLG and Defra through provision of ongoing data and narrative reporting and we have met with representatives of both departments in various forums.

INDEPENDENT INQUIRY

The holding of an independent inquiry into the floods and the response to them was agreed by Council leaders in early January. As mentioned above, the inquiry will also provide the investigative requirements of Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act (2010) which the Council, as Lead Local Flood Authority, is empowered to carry out.

An advert for the independent chair of that inquiry has been published, including terms of reference, which are to be refined with the successful candidate.

The Council leader and Group leaders are to meet for informal discussions with the shortlisted candidates on 30th March 2016 with formal interviews in early April.

This will be followed by a further advertisement for the members of the panel. Should it be found to be appropriate one or more of the unsuccessful applicants for independent chair may be suitable and willing to act as panel members.

It is important that the inquiry is not pre-empted or the gathering of evidence for it duplicated and work is underway to provide background information ready for the inquiry.

Steve Waddington

Assistant Director Housing & Community Safety

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