

SAFER & STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
6 SEPTEMBER 2010

FLOODING RESILIENCE

Dealing with resilience arrangements following lessons learnt from the 2007 floods.

1. Purpose

The purpose of this briefing is to:

- (i) Inform the Safer & Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee of progress by local resilience partners to increase resilience to flooding following the 2007 floods;
- (ii) Outline action taken to improve plans and processes to improve the local response to extreme weather incidents;
- (iii) Appraise the Safer & Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee of “Exercise Watermark” and the local activities planned to take place in relation to this national exercise.

2. Background

- 2.1 It is 3 years since the 2007 flood which affected many properties in Oxfordshire. The issue of Flooding is an ongoing concern, which was emphasised with the recent flooding events in Cumbria and in Merseyside in July.
- 2.2 In the aftermath of the 2007 floods, there were national and local lessons identified to direct activity in order to improve both resilience and response to flooding. The Pitt Inquiry directed by Sir Michael Pitt made 92 separate recommendations relating to six broad areas which included structural issues such as improved planning and reducing the risk of flooding and its impact, as well as those on flood rescue and recovery. Monitoring of progress in these areas has been undertaken by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The following background information covers the action being taken locally to implement learning from lessons and thereby increase resilience to flooding.

3. Structural issues

- 3.1 The Oxfordshire Strategic Flooding Group (OSFG) was established following the 2007 flooding and is an officer led partnership group made up of the County Council, City and District Councils, the Environment Agency and Thames Water.
- 3.2 The OSFG’s Terms of Reference have developed to include the aim of ‘Ensuring a long term approach to flood risk management in Oxfordshire ensuring clear accountability and coordination between all relevant parties as appropriate’. This group is the overarching strategic group in respect of flood risk management in the county. In addition to this group, district and city

council based groups have been established to discuss and address operational issues at a local level with the same partner organisations participating.

- 3.3 The group maintains an important role in reviewing new legislation or guidance and those of particular interest are the EU Floods Directive which came into force in December 2009 and of most note, the Flood and Water Management Act gained Royal assent in April of this year and is expected to become law in April 2011. The Act states that Unitary Authorities or County Councils are required to take on the role of Lead Local Flooding Authority in their given areas for all aspects of flooding with the exception of main rivers. The Group will therefore work on the elements required to conform to this new legislative framework.

4. Multi Agency response planning

- 4.1 Activities undertaken to improve the emergency response to flooding incidents have been taking place on several different levels to recognise the respective response levels of agencies.
- 4.2 Issues relating to multi-agency response and recovery from flooding have been actioned by the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum's (TVLRF) Flooding Sub Group. This was tasked with preparing a Multi Agency Flood Response Plan to provide an overarching strategic framework for a multi-agency response to a flood event within Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire. It sets out relevant issues and priorities and outlines procedures to help ensure that any multi-agency response is effective. This plan also identifies a number of operational details such as infrastructure considered to be at risk from flooding.
- 4.3 It is important to be aware that the plan is intended to only provide guidance. The nature of flood events is such that each one is different and the character of the multi agency response will depend on circumstances at the time of the incident.
- 4.4 Individual agency flood plans have been developed to complement the Thames Valley plan and ensure that there is increased co-ordination and streamlining of effort during periods of flood risk; one of the key lessons from the 2007 floods.

5. Local flood response plans

- 5.1 A local review of learning from flooding events and the recent snow in January 2010 identified the need to review actions in response to Met Office or Environment Agency alerts. The provision of alerts containing weather, river level and other technical forecasting information has developed since 2007 as a result of the Pitt recommendations and this provides responders with more timely information with supporting analysis. This provided a good opportunity to look at plans relating to extreme weather as a whole and therefore to review existing arrangements.

- 5.2 The result of this work is the development of a joint extreme weather response plan shared between the County, District and City Councils to make the activation and coordination of a response more streamlined. The Emergency Planning Unit currently has a member of staff working full-time on this project, liaising closely with partner agencies to ensure that the plan meets the requirements of all partners. With a common plan the partners will also be able to coordinate information to the community in the planning, response and recovery stages, thus improving the service offered to residents.
- 5.3 It is hoped that the joint plan will be prepared by November 2010 in order for training to be provided to staff by January and testing in March 2011.
- 5.4 Meanwhile, the Fire and Rescue Service has reviewed both local and national lessons learnt. With financial support from Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), the Service has provided further training and equipment to all operational staff to enable them to create a safe system of work to evacuate the public both before and after the onset of flooding events. All front line fire appliances are equipped and have this capability. This is supplemented by revised preparatory and command and control procedures. Access to national resilience resources has also been revised.

6. Parish / Community Flood Plans

- 6.1 Following the 2007 floods, the Environment Agency (EA) has led on a project to increase community resilience to flooding by working with communities to develop their own local flood plans. Using the communities most affected by flooding as a basis for the work, EA officers have rolled out a template plan to interested community groups, building local resilience to flooding, increasing take-up of the EA flood warning service and encouraging those with the best knowledge of water courses to monitor water levels and conditions.
- 6.2 There are currently 67 such community flood plans completed or underway in Oxfordshire, concentrating on areas at most risk from flooding. Many of these plans were developed in 2008/09 and now require review and updating. An opportunity to do this in a supporting large-scale event will be provided to communities in March 2011 as part of Exercise Watermark, which is described later in this report.

7. Community Emergency Plans

- 7.1 Since 2009 the government has promoted increased activity in the areas of community and individual resilience. The purpose is to educate and support people to prepare themselves, their families and homes for emergencies and to promote community resilience and community self-reliance.
- 7.2 The government's project complements work already underway in Oxfordshire to promote general community emergency plans, which was a result of learning from the 2007 floods. It was recognised at the time that in

widespread incidents (such as flooding), that emergency services, local authority and other resources would be stretched and therefore prioritised to the most vulnerable.

- 7.3 The Emergency Planning Unit developed a generic Community Emergency Plan template and supporting guidance for local communities in early 2009 in order to increase household and community resilience and thereby reduce the demand for external support or rescue and to extend the period that residents could be self-sufficient. These plans encourage communities to consider what risks (including flooding) exist in their areas and to make simple provisions accordingly. In the past year the emergency planning unit has promoted the template and guidance to communities through the County Council's quarterly publication and to Parish/Town councils directly through e-mails and attendance at individual Parish meetings.
- 7.4 These efforts have met with some success; there are a number of very good local plans in existence and in July 2010, 4 events were held for Parish/Town Councils to promote the development of community emergency plans with more than 50 councils attending. The 2 hour sessions had a mixed agenda with speakers from Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) Highways, Social & Community Services and Emergency Planning as well as the Environment Agency. All were supported and hosted by the District Councils who also support the development of the plans. These events have been so successful that they will be repeated in October 2010 to increase take-up of community emergency plans and to provide information on changes to the EA Flood Codes which will also launch from October 2010.

8. Individual Resilience

- 8.1 The most basic building-block for community resilience is to encourage individuals and families to prepare for emergencies so that they become more able to manage in emergency scenarios. The 2007 floods indicated that many people did not have a basic knowledge of whether their properties or businesses were at risk of flooding or the steps to take to prepare for such incidents. Subsequent events including the 2009 swine flu and 2010 snow have indicated that more effort is required to raise awareness of potential risks and to provide advice on how to prepare.
- 8.2 A range of initiatives are underway to promote individual resilience which include:
- A joint resilience website at www.thamesvalleylrf.org.uk to provide a range of information about risks, current emergencies and resilience information to residents of the Thames Valley;
 - A single publication in printed, electronic and audio versions: in 2009 the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum recognised that more basic information on risks and what preparations to make was required and has commissioned the publication of a comprehensive publication for residents. The "Are you ready?" booklet is being placed in public information points (libraries, GP surgeries, community buildings) for collection and where possible, is being delivered to households;

- Increased cooperation between partner agencies to join-up information relevant to particular risks such as flooding. In Oxfordshire this has resulted in the EA speaking at the Parish/Town Council events to promote joint community emergency and flooding plans so that communities prepare a single document that covers all risks.
- The revision of a joint communication strategy to streamline the provision of information to the public in advance of and during an emergency;
- Investment in an “Exercise Watermark” community-based event in March 2011.

9. Testing the learning from 2007 flooding / Exercise Watermark

- 9.1 Exercise Watermark is a National Exercise, lead by the Department for Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), managed by the Environment Agency and supported by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, designed to test national, regional and local flood plans. In essence, Exercise Watermark is aimed at consolidating and testing the learning from the 2007 floods.
- 9.2 The exercise is designed to take place over seven days from the 4th to the 11th March 2011 and the core part of the exercise will be split into 5 sections as follows:

Day/date	Core Focus	Core LRF's involved
Day 1 Mon 7/3/11	Surface Water Focus	London, West Yorkshire & Devon & Cornwall
Day 2 Tue 8/3/11	Fluvial Flooding Focus	Thames Valley, Surrey & London
Day 3 Weds 9/3/11	Reservoir Breach Focus	Derbyshire
Day 4 Thu 10/3/11	East Coast Tidal Flooding Focus	East Coast LA's
Day 5 Fri 11/3/11	Conference and workshops	Local Communities with support from LA's.

- 9.3 There are 3 parts of Exercise Watermark that the Thames Valley LRF has agreed to participate in to test plans and develop community engagement. This includes:
- Fluvial Flooding (Tues 8 March 2011)
 - Reservoir Flooding (Wed 9 March 2011)
 - Community Engagement (Sat 12 March 2011)
- 9.4 For the fluvial (river) scenario, DEFRA has confirmed that along with Surrey and London, the Thames Valley will be a core player for the testing of the response to fluvial flooding. This reflects the impact of the 2007 flooding on the area. Core LRF Planning Groups will lead the development and delivery of the local elements that make up the full core scenario of the exercise.

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- 9.5 As a core player the LRF will have the support of a contractor in the planning process. The contractors will work closely with both the LRF Planning Groups and EA Regional Planning Groups. They will be involved in developing the scenario and can also support modelling work as well as producing flood extent and impact maps. They will also be heavily involved in running the exercise week in March next year.
- 9.6 As a core element of the exercise on Day 2, responding agencies will test:
- command and coordination (Strategic, tactical and operational tiers)
 - emergency operation centres
 - handovers and standing down procedures
 - reports and returns including the use of on-line reporting
 - out of hours arrangements
 - other plans where there is a direct link to the TV LRF Multi-Agency Flood Plan including:
 - Mutual Aid arrangements
 - Communications and media
 - Vulnerable people
 - STAC (Scientific and Technical Advice in the event of an Emergency)
 - Recovery Working Group
- 9.7 For the Reservoir scenario, a tabletop style exercise will be run as a “bolt-on” exercise which is not central to the national activity but will use the national support materials to assist local agencies to work through the issues of a reservoir breach on responder agencies and the communities in the vicinity. This exercise will use a newly developed generic template for reservoir breaches and therefore will not be specifically based on any one reservoir. However, as a newly emerging area of work for emergency planning units, Exercise Watermark provides a valuable opportunity to test this subject with nationally provided support.
- 9.8 The Community Engagement event is aimed at community groups across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire that are currently engaged in flooding or community emergency planning activities. The event will be an opportunity to engage with the Exercise Watermark scenarios and to test local plans.
- 9.9 The event will take place on the weekend following the main Watermark exercise on Saturday 12 March 2011 at the Kings Centre which is a central Oxford location. The format of the day will be an exciting mix of briefings, tabletop exercises, video footage, exhibitions and practical displays with a high profile keynote speaker expected to attend.
- 9.10 The event will give each community group the opportunity to test their own community flood plan or community emergency plan against a challenging flooding scenario based on the Watermark exercise content. Local support will be provided by local councils, emergency services and the Environment Agency to provide information on how these agencies respond to a flooding event. The event also gives an opportunity for outdoor displays, with

attendees able to watch demonstrations of practical flood management techniques and equipment by the Environment Agency at their Osney Island depot site which is next door to the event venue.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 Oxfordshire County Council has been working with partners since 2007 to address the lessons identified in that response. This work is being carried out at all levels of the responder community; across the County with the development of a joint extreme weather response plan shared with the District Councils; locally with individuals and Parish/Town Councils and on a sub-regional basis through the production of a Thames Valley Multi-Agency Flood Plan.
- 10.2 Progress is being made in educating residents and communities as to the risk of flooding and how to prepare for flooding as well as encouraging the production of simple plans to increase resilience during periods when external assistance might be prioritised to the most vulnerable first.
- 10.3 Exercise Watermark and the national publicity which accompanies the exercise will provide responders with the opportunity to remind people/repeat information about flood preparations and re-engage with communities at risk of flooding with a high profile local event.

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