

Flooding – Emergency Response

Introduction

1. The document titled "Oxford Area Flood Information" was previously submitted to Environment Scrutiny committee. Part 3 contained details of the roles of different agencies in responding to flooding and information on the command and control structure. This report provides further information on the response to flooding.
2. Emergency response involves a large number of different agencies. All plan for emergencies, generally producing generic emergency plans rather than individual plans for different types of emergencies. This is because Emergency Planning deals with the management of the **consequences** of an emergency, whatever the cause.
3. This report gives details of what happens before and during an event, and the phase after an event when the local authority is likely to have a co-ordinating role in recovery.

Before

4. **Liaison and Meetings.** There is a well-established structure for liaison meetings, with most covering Oxfordshire but some covering the Thames Valley region. The local resilience forum involves local authorities, emergency services and voluntary agencies. The utilities meet with emergency planners and a wide range of agencies twice a year. In addition the Environment Agency hold annual meetings with professional partners. The group responsible for the production of the public flood plan document have recently agreed to continue to meet quarterly. They will examine specific issues such as flash flooding and work planning.
5. **Training and exercising.** The Environment Agency (EA) held a flooding exercise last year and there are many multi agency training/exercising events each year. The Chief Executive, strategic directors and staff from those business units involved in flooding response have all taken part in a number of these.

6. **Monitoring and information distribution.** Weather forecasts and the Environment Agency flooding website are closely monitored and the EA will make direct contact by telephone if there is specific information they think we should have. Earlier this year for example, we were contacted with detailed information of potential heavy rain. The County Council distributes weather and flood warning to District Councils and these in turn are passed on to the relevant business units. Warnings are put on the intranet to provide staff with the information when appropriate.

7. **Warning.** The Environment Agency has prime responsibility for warning the public, which it does through the media, the Floodline services, the use of automated voice messaging and other means such as loud hailers and flood wardens. Other agencies will assist if resources allow and only after they have completed other emergency tasks. The County Council Emergency operates City Alert Texting System (CATS) that allows them to send emergency messages and critical information directly to the public via a text message. The County Council have also has a siren/loudhailer system for warning the public.

8. **Information Provision.** There is a large amount of information available to the public in the form of booklets and leaflets produced by the EA, local authorities and private companies. Much of this is distributed to residents, community centres, etc. It can also be accessed via the Internet or from telephone contact such as the EA Floodline. Some of this information details measures the public can take to meet their responsibility for protecting their own property.

During an Emergency

9. **Command and Control.** There is a nationally agreed Command and Control system for major incidents and the same principles would apply in the event of major flooding. The response is organised at three levels. Gold has the Strategic role and is normally based at TV Police HQ; Silver has a tactical role and is normally operated from a Police Station. The Emergency Planning Officer will normally attend to act as liaison between the emergency services and the City Council; Bronze is the operational element and is normally located at a forward control point near the scene. The City Council has a vehicle and caravan available to be deployed to a forward control point. Agencies have agreed that even if a major incident is not declared, a co-ordination meeting without the full major incident structure, is an acceptable alternative depending on circumstances.

10. **Internal Liaison** For flooding and similar incidents a small team from the relevant business units, with a small amount of administrative support, led by a Director or senior manager will be set up. In the event of a Police Silver control being set up the Emergency Planning Officer would act as liaison between the two.

When a Flood Watch is issued for the Cherwell or Thames in Oxford the Emergency Planning Officer or Duty Contact Officer will contact the relevant business units to check appropriate arrangements are in place such as sandbag supplies etc. When a Flood Warning is issued for the Cherwell or Thames in Oxford, a meeting of main Business Units involved will be convened to agree action to be taken, reconfirm contact details and other issues such as timing of regular update meetings.

The location of the team will depend on a number of factors such as time of day and access. Potential areas identified include -

- An office area in City Works or OBS depots
- The Emergency Control room in the basement of St. Aldate's
- A suitable Forward Control Unit near the event

11. **Equipment and Resources.** Built Environment has purchased a mobile 6" pump housed a City Works and further pumps will be hired as required. In addition to their normal sandbag stocks City Works have 2000 pre-filled polypropylene sand bags. These are in two sizes, packed ready for distribution. The County Council holds an additional stock of sandbags. City Works have a stock of "Flood Sentry" products. These are used to protect properties by sealing external airbricks. Additional equipment such as waders, towels, thermal wraps, blankets and loud hailers are available to assist staff in responding to flooding.

12. **Business Units** – The role of each agency were listed in the earlier document. The roles undertaken by individual business units in an emergency are broadly an extension of their day-to-day roles. Some rely on volunteers as few staff have emergency response as part of their job descriptions. However, staff generally respond very positively in an emergency, working long hours often in very difficult conditions. This was illustrated earlier in the year by the flooding event at Knight's House and tends to be highlighted in the structured debriefs after an event. The safety of staff is a primary concern and insurance and liability issues must be considered in relation to any work undertaken.

13. **Evacuation.** The County Council take responsibility for setting up rest centres to care for people who have been evacuated. Normally schools are used but if numbers are relatively small, hotel accommodation may be considered. In the longer term the District Council will have responsibility for those who have been made homeless. Transport for evacuees will normally be provided by the County Council with City Works able to assist if required. Past experience has shown that many evacuees will often move to friends or relatives rather than go to a rest centre or other accommodation. Others may refuse to evacuate and the Police have no powers to force them.

14. **Media and information.** All the major agencies in Oxfordshire have an agreed Media Plan for emergencies. If required the County Council will set up an information/help line for the public and in addition have a contract with a commercial service to provide an information line.

15. **Mutual Aid** The County Council has mutual aid arrangements with several surrounding County Councils. Various district services have or are developing mutual aid arrangements. Business Continuity requirements are likely to act as a further catalyst to further mutual support.

16. **Voluntary organisations and other assistance.** Several voluntary agencies may be available to provide assistance during an incident such as the Red Cross and Women's Royal Voluntary Service [WRVS]. The County Council will co-ordinate these resources. In addition resources such as Military Aid, support from Regional Government and commercial organisations may be available.

Afterwards

17. **Recovery working Group.** At the earliest opportunity during a flooding event agencies will meet to plan for the return to normal, once the emergency is over. This group is known as the Recovery Working Group and is normally co-ordinated by the local authority. The County Council have a contract with a firm who can assist with clearing up. This work is chargeable.

18. **Debriefing.** A formal process is in place to consider what went well and not so well, and what lessons can be learned.

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