

Scrutiny Committee

Review of the Council's Response to Flooding – December 2015



Draft Final Report – April 2016

Task Group:

- ▶ Councillor Mick Titherington (Scrutiny Chair)
- ▶ Councillor Andrea Ball (Scrutiny Vice-chair)
- ▶ Councillor Barbara Nathan
- ▶ Councillor Karen Walton
- ▶ Councillor Paul Wharton
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What is Scrutiny?

Scrutiny is all about challenging decision made by the Council and other local organisations, keeping an eye on local issues and reviewing local policies.

In other words, Scrutiny acts like a watchdog for the people of South Ribble. It is about helping the council to work with local people, partners, other businesses and organisations and voluntary and community groups, to improve the quality of life of residents in the borough.

Scrutiny:

Challenges local performance so that we can raise standards, ensuring the services provided meet customers' expectations;

Questions the decisions of the Council's cabinet and other local organisations;

Reviews policies and becomes involved in the development of new policies;

Holds inquiries and reviews services provided by public organisations on issues of public interest or concern e.g. local hospitals, the police, fire service, utility companies etc.

Makes recommendations for action, change and improvement.

Who is Scrutiny?

Scrutiny is made up of twelve members of the Council who are appointed by all members of the council on an annual basis.

How can you get involved?

Local people and organisations have an important part to play in the Scrutiny process. If you use a service it is important that you let your councillors know your views on how it could be improved.

You can do this in a number of ways:

- ▶ Attend meetings
- ▶ Suggest a topic
- ▶ Get involved in a consultation

You could be asked for your views on an issue or be invited to provide specialist knowledge you have by being a witness in a Scrutiny review or by being co-opted onto one of the task groups.

More information?

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For further information on this review or to view the background information and research, please contact Darren Cranshaw, Scrutiny & Performance Manager on 01772 625512 or email: dcranshaw@southribble.gov.uk.

Rationale for the Review

In December 2015 and over the Christmas period South Ribble experienced severe flooding affecting 160 households.

Whilst it was felt that the Council had performed well at an operational level there were lessons to be learnt and things to improve for the future. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, Councillor Warren Bennett, asked the Scrutiny Committee to carry out this review.

The review was therefore scheduled into the Scrutiny work programme for once the internal de-brief had been completed and would be available to the Committee.

Scrutiny Committee Review Team

- ▶ Councillor Mick Titherington (Scrutiny Chair)
- ▶ Councillor Andrea Ball (Scrutiny Vice-chair)
- ▶ Councillor Barbara Nathan
- ▶ Councillor Karen Walton
- ▶ Councillor Paul Wharton
- ▶ Councillor Linda Woollard

Review Aims and Objectives

- ▶ To review the Council's response to the flooding affecting South Ribble over Christmas – December 2015.
- ▶ Identify and recommend areas for future improvement.

Methodology

In carrying out this review, the Task Group has carried out the following to inform the review and develop its findings and recommendations:

- ▶ Considered an internal de-brief report produced by the Head of Shared Assurance Services following contributions from officers involved in responding to the incident and was agreed by the Senior Management Team on 8 March 2016.

- ▶ Considered extracts of the Council's emergency plan with regards dealing with flooding.
- ▶ Reviewed the media coverage, social media activity, updates to the Council's website during and post-incident.
- ▶ Looked at a best practice published by the Environment Agency and Local Government Association.
- ▶ Informally made comparisons with the Council's response to that of neighbouring authorities.
- ▶ Met with the following Members/officers:
 - ▶ Councillor Warren Bennett – Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources (including emergency planning)
 - ▶ Mike Nuttall – Chief Executive
 - ▶ Ian Parker – Director of Governance & Business Transformation
 - ▶ Garry Barclay – Head of Shared Assurance Services
 - ▶ Steve Nugent – Head of Human Resources & Public Relations
 - ▶ Jennifer Mullin – Public Health Manager
 - ▶ Andrew Richardson – Neighbourhoods Manager
 - ▶ Dave Pollard – Senior Public Relations Officer

Key Findings

General

We found that the internal de-brief document was really helpful and endorses the recommendations contained in the report.

Leadership and Co-ordination

- ▶ The Council was slow to mobilise to respond to the situation and did not place relevant officers and services on standby before the Christmas closure at 12noon on 24 December 2016.
- ▶ There is confusion as to whether the Council's emergency plan was activated and therefore difficult to assess how roles and responsibilities were undertaken.
- ▶ There was lack of clarity as to which officer was leading the Council's response and directing what was needed.
- ▶ The Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources (lead Member for emergency panning) was not briefed or kept up to date with the flooding situation.
- ▶ The process for opening up the Civic Centre during holiday time was an issue.
- ▶ Response was hampered by the fact the Council closes down in between Christmas and New Year.
- ▶ The rest centres were mobilised in accordance with the emergency plan.
- ▶ There was a delay in the emergency management team meeting to respond to the situation and provide leadership and co-ordination. If the emergency management team had met earlier the Council's response would have been more effective.

Communication

- ▶ Communications with our residents, councillors and employees was too slow and ineffective.
- ▶ No information or communication was provided to councillors as community leaders.

Gateway Customer Service Centre

- ▶ Confusion as to the decision-making process for opening the Gateway Customer Service Centre, with no mechanism for formerly calling employees in to staff Gateway.
- ▶ Delay in opening the Gateway Customer Service Centre.
- ▶ Once up and running the Gateway Customer Service Centre provided a good service to our residents, processing payments and refunds to our customers efficiently and effectively.

Operational Response

- ▶ The Council ran out of sand bags and there was confusion amongst partner organisations as to who provided them and whether there were other more effective flood prevention barriers available.
- ▶ The on-call officer did his best to deal with the number of customer contacts received, but the service was put under severe pressure. The on-call officer acted appropriately. There were no procedures to draw on additional support.
- ▶ The operational response by the Neighbourhoods Team was effective and received positive feedback from those involved.
- ▶ The response by some local business who provided sand bags and equipment is to be commended.

Conclusions

We found that the Council's response to the flooding was too slow, there were issues about leadership and implementation of the emergency plan. This was compounded by a lack of communication and problems with opening the Gateway Customer Service Centre.

We would like to highlight the response by Neighbourhoods and work of South Ribble Gateway in responding to the operational work to deal with the flooding.

We also thank all the employees who worked over the Christmas and New Year period to respond to the various flooding issues across South Ribble.

Recommendations

1. The recommendations in the internal de-brief report be endorsed:

Action 1. Upon receipt of flood warnings from the EA, key services including Gateway & Neighbourhood Services to be put on notice that they may need to open for business out of normal office hours and provisional arrangements also made for the EMT to meet promptly to co-ordinate activities. This should occur simultaneously to putting rest centres on notice.

Action 2. The Council's PRO to attend the LRF Media Sub-Group to raise and progress the issue of dove-tailing local communication channels including social media with those of the lead emergency response agency in order to better inform residents and members of ongoing developments.

Action 3. To facilitate this the Council's PRO should also be given access to Resilience Direct.

Action 4. The Council to arrange for detailed mapping of the affected locations and supply these to the South Ribble multi-agency "Making Space for Water Group" at which LCC, EA and UU are represented.

Action 5. The Council should adopt a clear policy statement setting out its responsibilities with regard to the distribution of sandbags and this should be extensively publicised amongst members and the general public. This may include provision of sandbags at predetermined storage areas near to the most susceptible locations which local communities are able to access themselves.

Action 6. The EA to be invited to the Central My Neighbourhoods Forum to explain their plans for engaging with the community at Bannister Brook and to discuss how community resilience might operate more generally in the area.

Action 7. The learning from Central My Neighbourhood Forums to be applied to the other Forums in due course.

Action 8. In the meantime it is recommended that an article is placed in "Forward" Paper informing residents of the roles and responsibilities of all agencies including the Council in respect of flooding and to provide advice as to how residents should themselves prepare for flooding and build resilience into their properties. The limited value of sandbags should be mentioned and reference made to other products that are available on the market which residents should be encouraged to obtain taking a self-help approach (noting the grants that may be available to assist).

2. The Council appoints a Member flooding and drainage champion to support Cabinet in ensuring that flooding issues are promoted, tackled and co-ordinated across the Council at a member and officer level, including strengthening partnership working on these issues..

3. The emergency plan be reviewed and updated to include:
 - ▶ Clearer guidance on when to place relevant officers on standby
 - ▶ A clear process for briefing and updating the Cabinet Member and other relevant Cabinet Members
 - ▶ Process for opening and ensuring the Civic Centre is operational during holiday periods
4. Provide training and awareness for employees and councillors on the emergency plan.
5. Carry out practice exercises to test the emergency plan to ensure it is robust and evaluate how they have gone to improve emergency planning further.
6. In future, emergency management team meetings are organised and take place more promptly, with a clear log of the decisions and actions taken.
7. The Council opens in between Christmas and New Year on a skeleton staff basis to provide customer services.
8. A clear and proactive strategy is developed by the Councils to re-assure and provide information to our residents using the Council's website, social media channels, press releases and automated telephone message. This strategy should include residents, councillors and employees. Forming a key part of the emergency plan, standard and pre-prepared communications materials should be developed.
9. The on-call officer support be reviewed to allow more resources to dealing with calls. A process for escalating issues be developed to provide more re-assurance to the on-call duty officer.
10. The newly appointed Member Flooding and Drainage Champion (see recommendation 2) develop a policy for the provision of mobile flood barriers and how local communities through My Neighbourhood Forums could become more resilient and self-sufficient.
11. South Ribble Neighbourhoods Officers inspect gullies and pass on any issues to Lancashire County Council.

Finally

Thank you to the Members/officers involved in the review. We hope that the recommendations will be adopted to strengthen further the Council's response to any future emergency planning issue.

INTERNAL DE-BRIEFING REPORT
FLOODING IN SOUTH RIBBLE – CHRISTMAS 2015
SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM 8th MARCH 2016
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TASK GROUP 17th MARCH 2016

1. BACKGROUND - EMERGENCY PLANNING & RESPONSE

1.1 Under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 local authorities were designated “Category 1” status alongside the blue light services and other agencies in preparing for and responding to emergency incidents. Multi-agency activities are organised along county boundaries and the Lancashire Resilience Forum (LRF) exists locally to facilitate co-ordinated emergency planning, training and response activities.

1.2 Lancashire County Council (LCC) and district councils are all members of the LRF and LCC have a central role in co-ordinating the activities of districts and in liaising with the other main emergency services.

1.3 The roles and responsibilities of South Ribble Borough Council with regards to emergency planning and response are set out in its Emergency Plan (EP) which is updated and reviewed on a regular basis, most recently in October 2015. The core response procedure is shown at **Appendix 1**.

1.4 Shared Assurance Services (SAS) are responsible for updating and training officers on the content of the EP and in co-ordinating the Council’s strategic response to emergency incidents including external liaison with LCC and the emergency services and internally with the relevant services and officers.

1.5 This includes the ongoing monitoring of LRF partner information and notifications including those from the Met Office (MO) and Environment Agency (EA) and representing the Council at multi-agency meetings and teleconferences following the declaration of an emergency incident.

1.6 SAS will usually co-ordinate the Council’s response to an emergency and contact / involve relevant officers on an “as needs” basis depending on the nature and severity of the incident.

1.7 In the most serious, large scale incidents a more formalised approach may be required involving the establishment of an Emergency Management Team (EMT) and opening of an Emergency Control Centre (ECC).

1.8 A key role for SAS in a major emergency incident is to arrange for the opening of Council facilities such as Leisure Centres as rest centres to temporarily accommodate residents who may be evacuated from their homes and to make necessary transportation arrangements. The centres are all recorded in the EP and LCC are in turn responsible for operating these rest centres in conjunction with the voluntary sector. Any requests to support an evacuation are made by the Police to the LCC Emergency Planning Team who in turn contact the relevant district council.

1.9 District councils may also be called upon to supply other professional support and advice, for example Building Control Officers to advise on dangerous structures or Environmental Health Officers to provide advice on pollutants emanating from an emergency incident.

1.10 District councils have no statutory responsibility to provide operational support to deal with emergency incidents. Nevertheless, along with most other District Councils, South Ribble's Neighbourhood Services Team does support the main emergency services operationally by providing whatever manpower and equipment they are able to assist.

1.11 Within the Lancashire LRF there is also a Media Plan which outlines how the media will be communicated with during a multi-agency incident. **The Council's Public Relations Officer (PRO) should ensure that any communication with the media or general public on behalf of the Council is in co-ordination with the other agencies involved, and agreed by the lead agency.** The PRO should engage with the LRF Strategic Media Advisory Cell (SMAC) if activated to ensure consistency of information prior to any media release.

2. BACKGROUND - FLOODING

2.1 The LRF Multi-Agency Flood Plan (MAFP) sets out the respective roles and responsibilities of all the major agencies including local authorities in preparing for and responding to flooding incidents. The Council's own EP also contains specific local procedures to respond to flooding (**Appendix 2**).

2.2 The first notice of any potential flooding will be given by the Flood Forecasting Centre, a MO/EA partnership which issues 5-day Flood Guidance Statements to all responder agencies. These Statements indicate which areas of the country may be affected by flooding, on which days, the level of risk (high, medium or low) and the type(s) of flooding anticipated (coastal, fluvial (river), surface water, etc.).

2.3 If there is sufficient risk within Lancashire, the EA may elect to convene a multi-agency teleconference to consider the potential impacts in more detail and assess each agency's preparedness.

2.4 Such teleconferences may be repeated until the threat has passed or until it develops into a potentially significant flooding event in which case the LRF command & control incident room will open at Lancashire Constabulary HQ at Hutton and the LRF Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG) will convene an initial meeting whereby representatives from all agencies/authorities will attend in person or remotely via a dial in link.

2.5 The SCG will then co-ordinate all agencies' inputs to the developing incident and arrange media briefings as necessary. Nationally significant incidents will also include civil servants who will brief ministers of developments and potentially into COBRA (Cabinet Office Briefing Room A) meetings chaired by the Prime Minister.

2.6 SAS are responsible for co-ordinating the Council's strategic response to all emergency incidents including flooding and will represent the Council at EA and SCG meetings / teleconferences.

2.7 During an emergency incident SAS will act as the central liaison between the external agencies and internal services / officers as the incident progresses.

2.8 In terms of river flooding, the EA operate a warning escalation system whereby river levels are monitored at measuring stations along all the main water courses and taking account of projected rainfall amounts forecasted by the MO and tidal conditions will issue official Flood Alerts that flooding is possible at those specified locations. A Flood Alert may then be escalated to a Flood Warning and ultimately a Severe Flood Warning depending on the anticipated severity of the flooding event.

2.9 All the areas within the borough of significant risk from river flooding have already been pre-determined and mapped including the number of properties that could be potentially impacted at each location and these are recorded in the MAFP. The EA flood warning escalation system identifies the specific river(s) and area(s) recorded in the MAFP that are at risk of flooding.

2.10 The prime responsibility of the district council authority in a serious flooding incident is to open pre-determined rest centres to temporarily accommodate residents who are evacuated from their homes and to make necessary transportation arrangements.

2.11 In 2-tier local government areas such as Lancashire such requests are made by the Police to the County Council Emergency Planning Department who will in turn contact the relevant District Council to arrange for a designated rest centre(s) to be opened and to make transportation arrangements with designated bus/coach companies.

2.12 In anticipation of such a request SAS monitor detailed weather forecasts from the MO and EA flood alerts and warnings on-line on a continuous basis in order to gauge the potential impact locally and put rest centres on standby.

2.13 District councils have no statutory role to provide operational services on the ground in response to flooding incidents. The prime responsibilities here lie with the EA (rivers), LCC (highways) and United Utilities (drainage issues). Any requests to the Council for advice or assistance from members of the public are dealt with by Gateway and where relevant are directed to the appropriate agency.

2.14 The main role of Neighbourhood Services with regard to flooding is to provide maximum support to clean up operations after flood waters have subsided and the removal of flood damaged items from homes.

2.15 Nevertheless, along with most other District Councils, South Ribble's Neighbourhood Services Team does support the main emergency services operationally by providing whatever manpower and equipment they are able to assist, including the provision of some sandbags to properties at imminent risk of flooding.

2.16 Gateway therefore forward any service requests to Neighbourhood Services during office hours and these are automatically re-directed to the Out of Hours Duty Officer at other times.

3. CHRISTMAS 2015 - STORMS EVA & FRANK

3.1 December 2015 has now been confirmed as the warmest and wettest December since records began and the north west of England, especially Cumbria experienced the greatest impacts from the unprecedented weather.

3.2 The ground became completely saturated and the LRF activated the MAFP in response to hurricane "Desmond" earlier in the month with significant river flooding impacts throughout the County but particularly on the Lune, Wyre, Brock and Upper Ribble at Whalley and Ribchester.

3.3 Later in the month further heavy rainfall initially anticipated for Cumbria swung south abruptly into Lancashire on Christmas Eve (Thursday) just as all agencies had closed for their festive breaks and reduced to skeleton operations.

3.4 During Christmas Day (Friday) and Boxing Day (Saturday) the entire county was then affected by storm "Eva" which also extended further afield into Yorkshire and Greater Manchester. Rivers throughout the County experienced their highest ever recorded levels including stretches of the Lower Ribble and Ribble Estuary.

3.5 Extensive flooding impacts occurred outside the South Ribble area at Whalley and Ribchester on the Upper Ribble and later on the Yarrow and Douglas at Croston. Other significant river breaches occurred elsewhere in the County and the emergency resources were stretched to the maximum in those locations. The military support earlier deployed in Cumbria was relocated to Lancashire.

3.6 The MO also announced a further significant rainfall event “Storm Frank” which was anticipated before New Year’s Eve but ultimately Lancashire was to be spared as it headed northwards to affect Cumbria and Southern Scotland.

4. IMPACTS IN SOUTH RIBBLE

4.1 Overall South Ribble was spared the serious flooding impacts experienced elsewhere in the County and further afield. The MAFP was activated County wide and the LRF’s resources were largely directed to support the relief efforts elsewhere where there was serious risk to life and limb.

4.2 No severe flood warnings (the highest state of alert) were issued by the EA for the South Ribble area but several flood warnings were issued for the Ribble at Samlesbury, Walton le Dale and Lower Penwortham; the Ribble Estuary at Longton / Hutton, the Lostock in Central Leyland and also the River Darwen at Higher Walton.

4.3 Ultimately there were no significant river breaches in South Ribble but some over-topping of the Darwen at Higher Walton and the Lostock did occur, the latter at Western Drive in Central Leyland which experienced the worst fluvial impacts in the borough.

4.4 The main flooding impacts tended to be from surface water often due to the river levels being so high that surplus water was unable to drain into the water courses and this was experienced borough wide.

4.5 No request was forthcoming to the Council from LCC Emergency Planning or the emergency services for any co-ordinated evacuation from flood affected properties in South Ribble.

4.6 The EA removed all of the flood warnings in operation within the borough in the early hours of Sunday 27th December by which time the rain had subsided and the high tide on the Ribble had passed.

4.7 Borough-wide a scattering of 155 domestic properties and 50 businesses were ultimately to be affected by some degree of water ingress.

5. STRATEGIC RESPONSE

5.1 SAS participated in EA flooding teleconferences on Christmas Eve (Thursday) and Christmas morning (Friday) at which stage an initial LRF SCG meeting / teleconference was arranged for 11pm on Christmas Day. SCG meetings / teleconferences continued throughout the Christmas period and SAS represented the Council at each of them.

5.2 In between the official SCG updates SAS continuously monitored the emergency community's on-line network Resilience Direct, MO and EA web-sites and reports including monitoring of river levels throughout the borough during the flooding event.

5.3 SAS arranged for South Ribble Tennis Centre at Bamber Bridge to be put on notice to open as a rest centre should a co-ordinated evacuation become necessary.

5.4 SAS also established ongoing liaison with the Neighbourhood Services out of hours duty officer to track "on the ground" impacts of the flooding and receive updates on the operational response and the direct support being provided to residents and businesses.

5.5 Given that a major flooding incident did not occur in South Ribble the Head of SAS did not establish an EMT to deal with the response to the flooding but after consulting with the Chief Executive on Sunday 27th December it was agreed to arrange an EMT meeting on Monday 28th December to co-ordinate the recovery and clean-up operations and to ensure maximum preparations for Storm Frank which posed a further significant flooding risk later in the week.

5.6 The EMT was attended by the Head of SAS, CEO, Director of Neighbourhoods, Neighbourhoods duty officers and Drainage Technician. A conscious decision was made to allow the flood waters to recede on Sunday before commencing clean-up operations on Monday.

5.7 The Head of SAS then briefed the Council's Public Relations Officer who then opened communications channels to keep local residents and members informed of the Council's recovery plans in support of the multi-agency communications and media releases.

5.8 At this point the government announced the availability of one-off £500 payments to affected residents and businesses and this generated additional customer enquiries to those being received in respect of the clean-up and removal of flood damaged property. It was therefore agreed to call in Gateway officers to process calls the following day (Tuesday 29th December).

6. OPERATIONAL RESPONSE

6.1 Commencing on Christmas Day, Neighbourhoods Services out of hours on call team responded to calls from affected residents and businesses in order to support the prime responding agencies.

6.2 On the ground assessments were undertaken by Neighbourhoods Services to determine the extent of the water ingress to properties focusing on any potential threats to personal safety. Officers visited the affected areas door knocking to build up intelligence and provide reassurance to residents.

6.3 The Council's full stock of 200 sand bags was distributed to the areas of greatest need. Although normally an EA response, the Council appointed contractors to deploy a pump at the worst affected area at Western Drive in central Leyland.

6.4 Neighbourhood Services' officers still on holiday volunteered to return to work to support the response & relief effort. All of the Council's 4 road sweepers were put to task to clear sludge and debris in the worst affected areas especially any known sewerage issues.

6.5 A further 6 tonnes of sand was obtained and bagged in anticipation of any potential further flooding mid-week from storm "Frank". Drains, culverts and "trash" screens were also cleared in specified areas.

6.6 All the known affected residents were visited and provided with advice regarding the removal of damaged property and insurance requirements.

7. PRE-RECOVERY

7.1 Although the pan-Lancashire SCG process continued in "response" mode as ongoing difficulties were experienced in Croston, all practical measures were by then being taken by South Ribble Council to support local residents and business to recover from the flooding event.

7.2 The Government's official message was that all flooding enquiries should be directed to the Environment Agency's "Floodline" service but these were being re-directed back to local authorities. Gateway was therefore re-opened given its ability to deal with multiple calls and issue recorded messages advising of useful information. The Caretakers opened the Civic Centre and IT arranged for the switchboard to be re-opened. Gateway staff were called in and IT developed an immediate script to record details of those affected by flooding.

7.3 Although some special collections of flood damaged household items had already been made upon request from residents, this process now began in earnest as insurers had given clearance for damaged furniture, etc. to be removed. Skips were provided in some areas, used sandbags began to be removed and the road sweepers also continued to be fully deployed.

7.4 The Government began to issue guidance to districts via LCC as lead flooding authority regarding the provision of one-off £500 payments to affected residents and businesses. Provisional arrangements were established to locally administer those payments along with council tax relief and business rates relief.

7.5 Other funding schemes were activated such as Property Level Flood Resilience Grants, Boost Business Lancashire led by the LEP, the Community Foundation for Lancashire and support for farmers under a scheme administered by DEFRA.

8. RECOVERY

8.1 The LRF held its first substantive Strategic Recovery Co-ordination Group (SRCG) 4th January 2016 and this was supplemented by specialist sub-group meetings covering Finance & Legal, Business & Economic Development and Communications. Later forming additional sub groups of Community Resilience and Infrastructure.

8.2 SRBC officers were allocated to attending each of the above meetings and groups.

8.3 The Council's Economic Development and Community Involvement team visited the businesses in the affected areas to assess the impact and directing them to report into Gateway to enable eligibility for business rates relief to be assessed.

8.4 A web-page was also established to direct businesses to the various agencies in order to self-serve the other financial support available or alternatively arrange for help to do this.

8.5 SAS began to submit daily Impact Assessment Reports of affected properties to LCC to enable them to be collated into a Lancashire wide briefing for ministers.

8.6 The LRF agreed that final arrangements for the proposed Flood Resilience Grants would be put on hold following concerns from district councils regarding the anticipated difficulty and cost of administering claims.

8.7 Financial arrangements were established to collate the total costs incurred by the Council in responding to the flooding event and enquiries were made as to whether the Council could recover some of those costs under the Bellwin Scheme.

8.8 Through the LRF Communities Sub Group multi-agency drop-in centres were arranged across the county to provide residents and businesses with advice and support in the aftermath of the floods. South Ribble Civic Centre opened its doors to the public on 2nd February 2016 and was particularly well attended.

9. STRUCTURED DE-BRIEFING

9.1 A LRF flooding structured briefing meeting (covering the response phase only) to storms Clodagh, Desmond, Eva and Frank takes place on 21st March 2016. In preparation for this all responders have been requested to undertake their own internal briefings and to submit these to the LRF. A further LRF structured briefing covering the recovery phase will be arranged in due course.

9.2 All officers directly involved in the response to Storm Eva have completed debriefing questionnaires and the results are summarised below.

9.3 Following consideration by SMT and the Scrutiny Committee Task Group any resulting recommendations which need to be made externally will be included in the multi-agency briefing.

10. WHAT WORKED WELL

10.1 Storm Eva presented an unprecedented and possibly unique set of circumstances. The record rainfall and river levels originally anticipated in Cumbria swung south into Lancashire at the eleventh hour after all the emergency services had reduced to skeleton operations. In terms of the Council's readiness to respond there are very few occasions during the course of the year when the out of hours' service operates in excess of 2 days (weekends). In spite of this **the Council's strategic and operational responses both operated in accordance with the procedures laid out in the Multi-Agency Flood Plan and the Council's Emergency Plan.**

10.2 Strategically, arrangements were in hand to evacuate and temporarily accommodate residents had the need arose.

10.3 Operationally, the Council's out of office hours staffing arrangements coped well with the incident supported by the early return to work of Neighbourhood Officers. Proactive intervention in Central Leyland on behalf of the EA enabled over a dozen homes to be saved from the imminent flooding.

10.4 The clearance operation by Neighbourhoods Services was carried out in a swift and effective fashion. 30 additional tonnes of waste was removed as a direct result of property flooding within the borough. This volume of waste would ordinarily be collected in bulk waste over a four month period. None of this was recyclable due to flood water contamination.

10.5 Multi-media communications were activated by the Public Relations Team to inform residents of the developing situation.

10.6 The early re-opening of Gateway was particularly important in enabling the Council to respond to service requests and in disseminating information to residents.

10.7 Gateway supplied Shared Financial Services with details of flood affected properties enabling the £500 payments to be in customers' bank accounts by Monday 4th January, the first available banking day following the bank holiday.

11. LEARNING

11.1 Although serious river flooding did not occur in South Ribble it may nevertheless have been prudent for the Head of SAS to convene a meeting of the EMT a day earlier on Sunday 27th December. Had this occurred the additional recovery actions which were subsequently taken by the Council (opening local communications channels, re-opening of Gateway, early return of Neighbourhoods Officers, etc.) would also have taken place sooner.

Action 1. Upon receipt of flood warnings from the EA, key services including Gateway & Neighbourhood Services to be put on notice that they may need to open for business out of normal office hours and provisional arrangements also made for the EMT to meet promptly to co-ordinate activities. This should occur simultaneously to putting rest centres on notice.

11.2 Whilst local communications were activated by the Public Relations Team in support of multi-agency press releases, etc. social media in particular was slow to engage at South Ribble in contrast to neighbouring Chorley and Ribble Valley.

11.3 The relatively slow engagement of social media in South Ribble was due largely to there being far more severe flooding impacts and incidents in the other locations. Nevertheless the importance of social media as a communications tool has developed enormously in the recent past and best use needs to be made of it, whilst ensuring proper liaison between the Council's PRO and the lead emergency response agency to prevent inconsistent or conflicting messages being given to residents in rapidly changing emergency situations.

Action 2. The Council's PRO to attend the LRF Media Sub-Group to raise and progress the issue of dove-tailing local communication channels including social media with those of the lead emergency response agency in order to better inform residents and members of ongoing developments.

Action 3. To facilitate this the Council's PRO should also be given access to Resilience Direct.

11.4 Much of the flooding / water ingress experienced in the borough was due to surface water which may have been exacerbated by a reduction in other agencies' work programmes for cleaning/clearing water courses and trash screens.

Action 4. The Council to arrange for detailed mapping of the affected locations and supply these to the South Ribble multi-agency "Making Space for Water Group" at which LCC, EA and UU are represented.

11.5 During the flooding event a degree of confusion once again arose amongst the public and some members over the district council's responsibility with regard to sandbags. The effectiveness / usefulness of sandbags in preventing water ingress is limited and local authorities are under no obligation to supply them.

11.6 Questions have subsequently been asked by ministers of all district councils regarding their sandbagging arrangements including any agreements they may have in place with local builders' merchants for the out of hours supply of sand. Similarly the general public and some members have an expectation that this is a council role rather than it being their own responsibility to self-protect their own properties.

Action 5. The Council should adopt a clear policy statement setting out its responsibilities with regard to the distribution of sandbags and this should be extensively publicised amongst members and the general public. This may include provision of sandbags at predetermined storage areas near to the most susceptible locations which local communities are able to access themselves.

12. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

12.1 Whilst the Council and the other prime responders will always do what they can to respond to major emergencies there will be situations when resources are stretched to the maximum, for example where there are multiple serious flooding incidents occurring simultaneously in the County. In these situations it is becoming increasingly important that the community itself is able to play a role in terms of self-support.

12.2 The EA are currently looking to engage with communities as part of their Rapid Response Catchment (Flash Flooding) project and in South Ribble are looking for a community group in the Bannister Brook area in Leyland that would be willing to produce a Community Resilience Plan and are interested to know if the Council would like to be involved in supporting this project.

12.3 If successful this could be rolled out as an approach adopted by other communities in the South Ribble area.

Action 6. The EA to be invited to the Central My Neighbourhoods Forum to explain their plans for engaging with the community at Bannister Brook and to discuss how community resilience might operate more generally in the area.

Action 7. The learning from Central My Neighbourhood Forums to be applied to the other Forums in due course.

Action 8. In the meantime it is recommended that an article is placed in “Forward” Paper informing residents of the roles and responsibilities of all agencies including the Council in respect of flooding and to provide advice as to how residents should themselves prepare for flooding and build resilience into their properties. The limited value of sandbags should be mentioned and reference made to other products that are available on the market which residents should be encouraged to obtain taking a self-help approach (noting the grants that may be available to assist).

13. NEXT STEPS

13.1 Having now received feedback from SMT the report will now be presented to the Scrutiny Committee on 17th March 2016.

13.2 The Council’s EP to be amended to incorporate any agreed actions emanating from the scrutiny and LRF structured briefing processes.

Garry Barclay

Head of Shared Assurance Services

10th March 2016

APPENDIX 1 - Emergency Plan Core Response Procedure

1. The front line emergency services notify LCC Emergency Planning Unit (EPU) of any incident where local authority assistance is deemed necessary. LCC EPU then telephone the relevant District Council(s) concerned of the incident in accordance with the agreed contact details. LCC EPU will initially contact a member of the Risk Management Team in Shared Assurance Services (SAS) advising of an emergency incident requiring a local response.
2. The contact details of all relevant organisations throughout Lancashire are contained in the Multi-Agency Contact List, the latest versions of which are circulated monthly to SMT and posted on CONNECT. (Services – Shared Assurance Services – [Emergency Planning – Lancashire Emergency Contacts](#))
3. In the event that SAS officers are unavailable the CEO will be notified by LCC EPU.
4. There is the potential for a call to be received by Gateway during office hours or via the Duty Officer out of hours and these should be re-directed to SAS.
5. SAS will obtain relevant information of the incident sufficient to complete the [Incident Initial Notification Form](#).
6. SAS will assess whether a District Council response is required under the Civil Contingencies Act - see Chapter 1 – [Required Response Flowchart](#)
7. The type of response required will depend upon the nature of the incident reported to us. These range from major emergencies involving extensive and prompt district council response to those of a lesser or more progressive nature. Briefing Cards for the most common types of incident are shown in [Chapter 1](#) providing guidance on how to respond in each given situation.
8. Each Briefing Card will identify which service(s) should provide the initial response. In some cases this will require attendance at the scene of the incident and in these cases the Briefing Cards state who will act as the Forward Control Officer (FCO). The main role of the FCO is to attend the scene of the incident to assess the scale and nature of the Council's response.
9. The FCO will notify the lead officer/agency of their contact details and estimated time of arrival at the scene. Ideally the FCO should have available their Council ID badge and/or some form of photographic ID.
10. The FCO will then contact SAS to provide a fuller assessment of the scale and nature of the incident. SAS will then notify the CEO and the relevant Director/Head of Service if necessary. At this point a decision will be made whether the Emergency Plan should be invoked, wholly or in part.
11. In most cases SAS are then best placed to co-ordinate the Council's response and contact relevant officers on an "as needs" basis. However in the most serious, large scale incidents a more formalised approach will be required involving the establishment of an [Emergency Management Team \(EMT\)](#) and [Emergency Control Centre \(ECC\)](#).

APPENDIX 2

EMERGENCY BRIEFING CARD NO: 3 – FLOODING

DESCRIPTON:

South Ribble is at risk from fluvial (rivers and watercourses), pluvial (surface water) and ground water flooding.

Identified Risk Areas: The borough contains 6 Environment Agency Flood Warning Areas and 1 rapid response catchment which are detailed in the Councils Plan

COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Assess the situation and implement the Flood Plan and co-ordinate the cross service Council response.
- Monitor partner information and notifications related to severe weather and flooding to inform the decision process and prepare to act in accordance with professional advice (Flood Alerts/Warnings/Flood Guidance Statement/National Severe Weather Warnings etc.)
- Utilise Hazard Manager to access up to date forecast or current weather information
- Liaise with the Environment Agency Flood Incident Room upon notification of a flood warning to ascertain the likelihood, duration and severity of flooding tel 01772 714254
- Participate in EA multi-agency teleconferences
- Liaise with the Police Flood Liaison Officer, LCC Highways, Lancashire Fire and Rescue and LCC Emergency Planning Duty Officer and other relevant agencies, providing operational support if appropriate
- Consider need for a Forward Control Officer. Usually this will be someone from Neighbourhoods, out of hours this is likely to be the OODO or the Duty Laborer
- Appropriate personnel to attend multi-agency Operational or Tactical Commands and Strategic Coordinating Group where applicable
- Where resources permit distribute sandbags to identified areas or individuals
- Provision of transport and Rest Centres for those evacuated – see Chapter 7 – Rest Centres
- Consider longer term impacts, start to plan for the recovery of flooded areas
- Assessment of structurally unsafe properties by Building Control
- Respond to public contact relating to Council owned watercourses or surface water run-off from Council property/land
- Assist in the dissemination of public information and where resources allow support the Police in conducting door to door warning and informing
- Escalate the response by activating the Emergency Plan if necessary
- Use Resilience Direct to stay informed and to provide agency situation reports
- Maintain accurate incident logs and maintain internal situation reports
- Dependent on scale of incident provide a point of contact for the public and deal with general enquiries during and after flooding, redirecting to other agencies

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Consider the long-term recovery (link: Flood Plan Section 7 - Recovery, [Emergency Plan Chapter 9 - Recovery](#))
- Waste Management – assist residents to dispose of waste
- Impact on homes/businesses and accommodation needs
- Consider need to inform Progress Housing Group for them to support residents
- Financial impact on residents and businesses
- Resident queries and provision of advice: emergency, public health, financial, general

SOURCES OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Please refer to the Council's Flood Plan for activation and response detail. Appendix A of the Flood Plan contains the flood risk area information and maps.

For further details refer to: Lancashire Resilience Forums Multi-Agency Flood Plan

RESILIENCE DIRECT LINKS: [<Flood Plan>](#) [<Emergency Plan>](#) [<SRBC Contacts>](#) [<Multi-Agency Flood Plan>](#) [<SRBC Rest Centres>](#) These links will work if you have Resilience Direct open or if you are reading this document from RD to enable quick links to relevant documents