

Scrutiny Committee

Meeting to be held on Friday, 13 May 2016

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

EP&R and FRM Joint Report Winter Floods 2015

(Appendices A - C refer)

Contact for further information:

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Executive Summary

The report outlines the County Council's involvement in response and recovery, and the subsequent flood risk management activities, to the wide-spread floods in December 2015. The report includes reference to the engagement with affected parties, organisational partners, central government and the Environment Agency; and the longer-term measures that might be required to improve flood risk management.

Recommendation

That the response to date be noted and the Committee's advice on further appropriate response activities be expressed.

Background

Severe Weather November/December 2015

Severe weather impacted Lancashire over the weekend of 14/15 November 2015 resulting in a number of flood warnings being issued in respect of Ribchester and Whalley in the Ribble Valley, Padiham in Burnley and Samlesbury and Walton-le-Dale, South Ribble.

In respect of Ribble Valley, temporary flood defences were deployed around Ribchester and Whalley by the Environment Agency and the Military, and rest centres (Longridge Civic Hall - Ribchester residents and Roefield Leisure Centre - Whalley residents) were activated in preparation for residents needing to be evacuated from the affected areas, see summary report – Appendix A.

Fortunately the weather dissipated and the temporary flood defences proved successful in mitigating any serious flood damage to property.

From Friday 4 to Sunday 6 December, **Storm Desmond** brought heavy rain to Lancashire which led to flooding at St Michaels on Wyre and parts of Lancaster. On Sunday evening a Severe Flood Warning was issued for the River Wyre at St. Michaels.

In Lancaster, the majority of the flooding was confined in and around Lancaster City Centre leading to the closure of Greyhound Bridge and Skerton Bridge across the River Lune. There were also many roads closed in the area due to the flooding and travel between Morecambe and Lancaster was seriously affected as was the West Coast Main Line (including Lancaster Railway Station).

The flooding also severely affected an electrical sub-station near Garstang causing a loss of power to approximately 64,000 properties in the Lancaster and Garstang areas.

A further rainfall event on Saturday 12 December 2015, on top of still saturated land, meant that river levels, brooks, streams and water catchments rose extremely quickly which resulted in a number of river levels reaching their all-time level highs. 17 flood warnings were issued across the county for Ribble Valley, Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale and a Severe Flood Warning was issued again for the River Wyre at St Michaels. This event resulted in the flooding of a number of properties and businesses in Ribble Valley. (Following consultation/discussion by LCC with Central Government it was confirmed this was as a direct consequence of Storm Desmond, and those affected in Ribble Valley would qualify for grants and payments.)

The Christmas period was also unsettled, wet and mild. **Storm Eva** brought gales and heavy rain on Christmas Eve with another Atlantic depression bringing heavy rain and flooding to north-west England. These storms brought with them exceptionally high levels of rainfall (The rainfall total across Lancashire was 95mm/over 37" in 36 hours.) falling on already saturated ground, leading to numerous flooding situations.

At its height there were **54 Flood Warnings** in place across the County.

In Lancashire, record-breaking river levels were recorded during December 2015 by the Environment Agency at:

- River Ribble at Samlesbury (South Ribble district) – previous highest level: 5.97m; 26 December 2015 recorded 6.38m;
- River Lune at Caton (Lancaster district) – previous highest level: 5.83m/ 5 December 2015 recorded 7.06m.

To assist in understanding the relative scale of river flows, the Environment Agency's early estimates for the events in December 2015 are as follows:

- River Calder experienced 1 in 200 year flows
- River Douglas experienced 1 in 100 year flows
- Pendle Water experienced 1 in 100 year flows
- River Ribble experienced 1 in 100 year flows
- River Yarrow experienced 1 in 75 year flows
- River Lune experienced 1 in 250 year flows

Appendix B provides a graphical representation of river flows across the country (courtesy of the Environment Agency).

The effects of Storm Desmond and Storm Eva meant that all 12 Lancashire districts (and Blackburn with Darwen Council) were affected by the floods.

In summary:

- **1,791 household** and **532 business** had flooding to habitable internal rooms. (These businesses/households have successfully applied for flood grants but there were also numerous other premises that were flooded internally that have either not made applications or are awaiting confirmation of their application. Confirmation of these numbers is one of the priorities of the data assessment still underway.)
- In addition, it is estimated that over **7,031 businesses were directly affected** (but not flooded), due mainly to loss of electricity, predominantly in Lancaster during Storm Desmond, and denial of access due to flooded roads and closure of storm damaged bridges.
- Military Aid was deployed during both storms across Lancashire to assist with repairs to the breaches and support to the communities.

In addition many more properties were adversely affected by flooding to garages, porches, cellars, outbuildings and access roads (either obstructed by temporary flood water or by longer-term structural safety problems). In addition, many thousands lost power when transmission routes for gas and electricity were knocked out by flood water, and a number of water treatment plants were unable to function normally. Power losses also affected transmission of mobile telephone signals as base station's emergency power supplies failed to cope with the prolonged event.

The full scale of the flooding impact is still being collected by Lancashire County Council's flood risk management team from records made by organisational partners including LCC Highways, District Councils, the Environment Agency and United Utilities plc. However we can already advise on the basis of these statistics that the flooding of December 2015 has been unparalleled by any recent experience in the county.

LCC (Acute) Response to the Flood Events

The council's core role in the event of flooding emergencies is, in the first instance, to provide support and assistance to the emergency services in protecting life and property.

Our other responsibilities are to mitigate the consequences of the emergency on the community by:

- assisting people who have been evacuated through the provision of rest centres (eg. on Boxing Day 5 centres were opened across the county).
- lead on the identification of vulnerable people/premises and the assessment of their needs (eg. On New Year's Eve, LCC Emergency Planning worked in liaison with RVBC to access support from Lancashire Care Foundation Trust and British Red Cross to provide emotional support, both deployed resources into Whalley).
- responding to incidents on the public highway (Highways staff were out in force during all these events and over the Boxing Day weekend, including more than 70 people who were called in from leave.) and infrastructure (i.e. bridges)
- ensuring priority LCC services continue to be delivered
- informing the public as part of the multi-agency response

LCC responded to the incidents in November and December both on the ground through highways carrying out clearing operations, traffic management, flooding mitigation of key assets etc.; LCC Emergency Response Group and social (adult and children's) care support at rest centres and to communities; waste management during clean up operations; but also behind the scenes managing the response as part of the multi-agency effort to support the population and mitigate the effects of the multiple incidents through work in communications, strategic and tactical co-ordination, ensuring support to vulnerable people, arranging support to communities, working closely with districts, emergency services, military, EA, utility providers, health providers etc. and acting as a main conduit between the local response and central government. Alongside dealing with flooding issues to LCC premises themselves.

The storm incidents (Desmond and Eva) created large amounts of pressure on LCC as they impacted on every district within the County. A two-tiered tactical response was deployed by the multi-agency management structure due to the geographical spread of the impacts, with district councils taking the lead for their specific areas and LCC supporting the county wide emergency services response. All supported by an overarching strategic response with LCC representation by EP&R service and the Director On Call arrangements.

Though the ongoing debrief process will undoubtedly identify areas for improvement, it is generally felt that the emergency response phase was managed effectively given the unique nature of this incident, the time of year and available LCC resources. It should be noted that although there was a large impact on properties across the whole county, no lives were lost in Lancashire as a direct result of the flooding.

Flood Risk Management aspect of Response to flood events

As identified above, the flood risk management aspect of the Response was focused primarily on protecting people and property, and an essential subsidiary target was to maintain emergency access for those in need of this protection along the local road network.

Records made by affected parties and by the various responding organisations are proving extremely valuable resources for the investigation of the ways in which flooding has happened at various locations around Lancashire. They are leading to an understanding of how interventions might help to reduce future risk of flooding (either severity or frequency).

Recovery phase of response to flooding events

On Friday 01 January 2016, SCG (multi-agency Strategic Coordinating Group) announced that the events had moved to Recovery phase, and activities thereafter have been managed locally by the district authorities supported and coordinated through the Strategic Recovery Coordinating Group (SRCG) and its subgroups, supported and led by LCC services.

The recovery phase is still underway and may continue for some months.

The Recovery phase of managing the flooding events is focused on helping those individuals and households affected to return to 'normality' and impacted businesses to be able to trade again and return to their 'business as normal' status. The recovery phase provided LCC, together with organisational partners, new opportunities to engage with affected communities to raise awareness of flood risk management issues and explain the opportunities available to individuals and to communities to take control of their own risks and manage them.

The structures and functions of the strategic recovery process is outlined in the report presented to Management Team (14 March 2016) – Appendix C (since the production of this report the specific figures have and continue to change, this was the position at that time).

Learning

An internal (LCC) debrief of the acute phase of the Winter Floodings has taken place and the findings are being finalised for a report to LCC Management Team.

Findings which have a wider impact have been fed into the multi-agency pan Lancashire debrief conducted by the Local Resilience Forum and key issues will be taken from here to inform national discussions. The Emergency Planning & Resilience Service will also share these findings with other affected counties eg. Cumbria, to ensure learning from other areas experiences can be gained.

The recovery phase is still underway and once complete will be followed by various debriefs to capture lessons – many have already been incorporated into the ongoing process as the recovery phase develops and changes.

Learnings are and will be incorporated into future iterations of plans and operational practice, as is the norm, with the aim of continually improving the response to such incidents.

Consultations

n/a

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

There are no significant risk implications in this report

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
n/a	n/a	n/a

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate