

Somerset Flood Summit

Final report

Appendices

Meeting Etiquette

The Somerset Flooding Summit Steering Group want to make sure that everyone attending the event have a positive experience. We are aware that many of you are passionate about the very important issues the Summit will cover and we want to make sure that everyone gets an opportunity to make a positive and constructive contribution.

With this in mind, we have drawn up this **Meeting Etiquette** which we ask all delegates to observe:

A meeting is as successful as the positive contributions of its members. These practical steps will ensure everyone gets the most out of the opportunity:

- Meetings are for the benefit of all and no one person has the right to dominate or be disruptive. People should be addressed courteously and should feel comfortable enough to make their contributions;
- Whilst the Chair is finally responsible for managing the meeting, it is everyone's responsibility to make the Chair's job as smooth as possible for the good of all. The Chair will aim to ensure that meeting times are managed well so that everything can run to time. They also need to manage contributions, keep contributors from repeating themselves, and ensure a few individuals do not monopolise the time. This will ensure that equality and courtesy are maintained.
- Everyone should be aware of other people's rights to be treated with courtesy. Nobody should feel bullied or insulted or be verbally attacked. Should anyone disagree with someone else, then there is a friendly and courteous way to disagree;
- Those wishing to speak should signal their intention to the chair and wait to be invited to speak. Before speaking, you should construct the points you wish to make and stick to them, speaking for as short a time as possible without repetition whilst using clear, non-defamatory language. The Chair will need to take firm line with people who speak without waiting for an invitation, but the Chair will also need to be aware of any difficulty, for example sight or hearing impairment.
- The Chair has a duty to stop disruptive practices and can ask those displaying unacceptable behaviour to leave – this would always be a last resort.
- In group discussion, each participant should make space for all others who so wish, to have a chance to contribute.
- Be open to innovation and prepared to learn from others.

We ask that all those attending today will:

- Really listen to what people say
- Make any criticisms constructively
- Contribute at least once; and
- Make the most of this opportunity

Community Resilience Workshop

The Session began with introductory presentations from the agency representatives present:

Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue

- Community resilience is important as during a large scale flooding event, it is inevitable that agencies may be swamped and in any case can't be everywhere at once.
- Fire & Rescue services have a statutory responsibility with the other 'blue light' agencies to lead during the emergency phase of incidents such as flooding.
- Fire & Rescue services also do everything they can to prevent flooding by seeking to identify risks in the community and enabling communities to assist themselves during the acute phase in particular
- If risk to life not present, no duty to rescue people from flooding, but in reality fire & rescue services will do everything they can to help
- Are lobbying Government to provide clarity as to which agency has responsibility for rescuing people from floods
- Fire & Rescue services are concerned that if homes are cut off by severe flooding, that they may be unable to fulfil their statutory duty.
- Are working with communities on prevention initiatives, by visiting homes they think may be at risk and identifying changes or improvements needed to make people safer, such as homeowners turning electricity off when flooded.

Avon & Somerset Police

- As with many agencies, the Police are suffering budget cuts so haven't got the resources to deal with spontaneous flooding events unless it becomes a civil contingencies issue.
- Motorists becoming stuck in floods becoming a drain on resources for the police – considering issuing fines to motorist who do not heed 'road closed' signs.
- Police piloting giving authority to community groups to close roads in cases of flooding.

Environment Agency

- The EA are working with communities to help them help themselves by developing community flood warden schemes and flood plans. This work is not restricted to parish councils – can be any suitable community group.

Civil Contingencies

- Recognises the crucial role community resilience has to play in coping with serious flooding events – particularly during the acute phase
- Schemes where Parish Councils help to find accommodation for people displaced by flooding have proven to be successful – would like to try more widely.
- Keen to gather ideas as to equipment / skills communities need in order to become more resilient.

The session was then opened up to wider discussion, with key points as follows:

- Clearing timber which has fallen into watercourses or onto highways more quickly could help prevent flooding to homes – there is a problem with this caused by parishes being uncertain where they stand legally on doing this type of work on highways/rivers?
- Vehicles driving through floods too quickly causing bow waves is a problem as this can cause homes to flood – roads need to be closed sooner in order to prevent this?

(Note: Police added that they can empower people to make enforceable road closure – this was well supported by attendees)

- Clarification needed on legislation in terms of managing risks associated with community resilience activity.
- Many people get stuck when trying to drive through floods due to underestimating the depth. Could markers be installed on roads to assist drivers in judging the depth of flood waters?
- Gullies being blocked is exacerbating the problem
- Communities recognise that in times of widespread flooding, they are on their own and are keen to develop resilience
- 4x4 vehicles have proven to be essential during serious flooding for getting supplies through to vulnerable people, however, it is important for drivers to be aware of the need to go through floods slowly in order to avoid pushing water over defences (sand bags etc) into people's homes.
- People need to be made aware of the dangers of walking through floods as they don't know how deep the water is or may fall down/over submerged obstacles
- Communities need their own supplies to make sandbags rather than relying on DC's

Discussion across the group on this issue – question: used sandbags are contaminated, how / where should they be disposed of?

- There is often a strong community spirit, but liability is a real fear for people, which can stifle this. Agencies need to give clear advice on this – they either need to devolve greater responsibility to communities or be more responsive.

Discussion across the group expressing strong agreement with this statement and expressing dissatisfaction with the poor performance of the County Council for not clearing out drains more regularly.

- Somerset County Council are piloting a scheme where GIS equipment is given to parishes for them to pin-point the position of the drains which in their view are of greatest priority for clearing.
- Somerset County Council only clear the drains themselves, not the pipes leading away from the drain *Question: how do we find out who is responsible for the pipes leading away from drains?*
- Parishes need agencies to produce advice sheets 'how to help yourselves' and clear advice on who to go to under various circumstances
- Somerset County Council need to coordinate the clearing of gullies better

Discussion across the group, giving examples of occasions where the gully clearing crews had been undertaken incompletely and inefficiently – the group speculated that the way in which the contract is managed could be the cause of these issues.

- Communities found that the Environment Agency river level readings on their website were not up to date enough – usually over an hour out of date.

Environment Agency representative informed the group that they agreed that data needed to be as 'live' as possible and that they were already working to improve this nationally.

Conclusions

The group agreed that there is a strong desire from communities to be able to develop greater resilience and increase self-sufficiency during major flooding events. The group recognised that during such events, it was unrealistic to expect the agencies to be everywhere at once due to resource limitations. Hand in hand with this recognition came a frustration from the group that the agencies also needed to accept that if they could not meet community needs fully during these circumstances, that they needed to 'let go' and empower communities to help themselves. In order to be able to achieve this, the group agreed the following were needed:

1. Clarity is needed urgently on which agency people should go to under various circumstances for help. The websites of all relevant agencies are unclear and confusing at present – the agencies should work together to resolve this and ensure common terms and simple language are used.
2. Agencies need to work together with communities to support them towards creating practical and resourced plans
3. Agencies need to provide support to communities to realise these plans, this could be
 - Equipment

- Financial Support
 - Training / advice
4. Agencies need to provide reassurance to communities on liability – this may need deregulation at national level.

Business Continuity and Economic Impact Workshop

Main Issues

- Business unable to get insurance (not an act of god)
- £180 million in economic losses – based on SW Chambers figures
- Evidence of businesses having to close
- Loss of crops and produce
- Redundancies and total business failures
- Common messages and stats needed
- Somerset will become known to potential investors as somewhere it is too risky to invest
- £1000 per acre of agricultural land under water
- Need to be able to put together a credible business case to the treasury for greater government support
- Danger the compensation approach will drain public resources that could be better spent on prevention
- Recovery and Self help
- Investment in own resilience / adaption for agriculture
- What can be done nationally?
 - Need political commitment to overarching management plan
 - Establish position on underwriting insurance claims

Priorities for improving vulnerable infrastructure

- Assemble economic business case for dredging investment (£5 million capital, £270k for 2 year's maintenance)
 - Combination of funding sources and ensure local budgets agreed priorities
- May need to de-prioritise drainage in wettest areas in order to focus local budgets for biggest impact.

What can businesses do for themselves?

- Looking at their own resilience – **Investment** – adapting agricultural practices

What should be done to support businesses to recover from floods?

- Prevention better than cure
- Better business advice – insurance advice
- Personal level protection – parish level purchase of individual flood prevention equipment

What can be done nationally?

- Get government funding – get rural issues on the agenda – if such large areas of urban economic land were at risk of flooding - there would be greater government support
- Long term management plan (commitment)
- Change in criteria to trigger investment
- Outcome of discussions between insurance and government for underwriting insurance claims
- Better guidance on contingencies plans from insurance companies to make firms insurable
- Stressing the case about the importance of agricultural land – food security

Priority actions –

- If we find £5 million, would there be any barriers to starting the dredging asap ?
- Rapid assembly of economic business case
- Review all budgets against priorities
- Improve vulnerable infrastructure
 - o Strong business case for dredging – initial £5 million (capital) £270k every 2 years for regular maintenance
 - o Do we continue to carry out drainage in the wettest areas (adaption?)
 - o Can we attract European funding?

Interagency Working Workshop

What can be done to improve inter-agency working to improve flood responses?

- Constant flow of accurate and timely information – imperative that it is relevant information
- More information required for planning purposes
- Pre-planning maps / ditches / clearance screens etc
- Strategic Flood Risk Management Group – increased profile / direction / sub groups etc
- Need a single point of contact
- The problem is not operational – need to work through the above points and that should lead to single point of info for everybody to feed into. Sharing critical pieces of information
- National support
 - o Dredging of main water courses
 - o Appropriate equipment and training available to emergency services

Flood prevention Workshop

- Add an objective to the New Land Management Scheme (operated by DEFRA?NE and developed to replace environmental stewardship) the new objective would be flood prevention / alleviation.
- Attenuation of water at a higher level (electricity use)
- Attenuation to whole water management (upper and lower catchment areas) Parratt catchment project

- Better understanding how the level hydraulically work
- If proposals which would provoke the Reservoirs Act would be low risk should be considered
- Better DEFRA guidance regarding volumes not just quantity – land management schemes.