

Topic

Financial support for individuals

Incident / Exercise

Incident: Cumbria Floods November 2009

Background and Context

Between Wednesday 18 November and Friday 20 November 2009, up to 372mm of rain fell on Cumbria. In the 24 hours ending 00:45 on Friday the 20th, 314mm of rain fell on Seathwaite. This is a record daily rainfall for the UK. The rainfall earlier in the week ensured that the ground was saturated in many areas. Flooding occurred in five out of the six Boroughs, the only one escaping being Barrow. The effect on properties was concentrated in Allerdale and South Lakeland with the most significant infrastructure damage occurring in Allerdale.

- One person lost their life
- 2,239 properties affected.
- 250 farms affected
- 25 bridges closed (for over 6 weeks)
- Significant highway road infrastructure damage
- Port of Workington closed (entrance to port obstructed by debris washed downstream)
- 40 out of 300 waste water treatment works affected Economic impact on surrounding areas caused by infrastructure issues
- 3,057 businesses affected
- 80% of businesses in Cockermouth affected by flooding
- Estimated costs of £2m per week to public and private sectors and the Communities caused by increased travel time
- 461 additional pupils requiring school transport
- Lake District National Park had 319 separate reports of damage to the rights of way network.

How the Topic was Handled

Recovery planning began early whilst the response was still on going. This allowed key partners to get together and set up sub working groups on Welfare, Business, Environment, Communications, Finance and Infrastructure, in line with the Recovery Plan, to prepare for the recovery phase and quickly respond once the emergency was over. Community recovery groups were also established. The following case study relates to one year on after the floods to place in context the size; scale and duration of the recovery work.

Cumbria Flood Recovery Fund

The fundraising efforts of the Cumbria Community Foundation and its Cumbria Flood Recovery Fund have been one of the defining features of the flood recovery operation. A total of £2.9m has been raised in the last year through 5,349 different donations. The largest single donor was Cockermouth-based brewer Jennings, who raised £178,497 by donating 10p for every pint they sold. The average size of donation was £475 and well over £1m was raised from within Cumbria.

A total of £2.2m has been paid out already.

£1.1m has been awarded so far in grants to individuals (82% of them to people living in Allerdale), and 616 flooded households have been helped, with the average grant size £774. A further 567 non-flooded households have been helped, with the average grant size totalling £359. The largest single grant awarded was to a man in his 80s with no insurance who received £19,000 to match a Soldiers; Sailors; Airmen and Families grant to repair his home.

A further £1.1m has been awarded to 100 different organisations through group grants. The largest was a £117,000 award to Impact Housing for the rent of the furniture warehouse operating after the floods and the purchase of white goods for people on low incomes. The average group grant was for £15,695 per group.

Of the rest of the money, £400,000 has been linked to larger resilience projects and donor requested support, £100,000 has been awarded in principle but waiting for further information from applicants, and £300,000 is currently unallocated, but more applications are in the pipeline – although the Cumbria Community Foundation is keen to consider more applicants from South Lakeland, where there has been a relatively low number of applicants.

The focus of Cumbria Community Foundation's work has inevitably been Cockermouth, where over £420,000 has been distributed to 389 different households. More than 50 of the households were people who had lost income because of the floods, including people running shops on Main Street, pensioners who relied on income from flooded holiday lets, and self-employed tradesmen who lost vital tools in workshops and vehicles. More than 60 households were helped because they had lost income as a result of being employed by a flood-affected business

The Cumbria Flood Recovery Fund has contributed £50,000 towards the flood defences in Gote Road and has put another £100,000 aside to try to secure Government funding for further defences in the town centre next year. Money has also been invested in improving community resilience, paying for individual flood gates and non-return valves on properties and supporting flood action groups.

The Cumbria Community Foundation will be offering a special flood kit to each household that was flooded last year. The water proof bag includes light sticks, wind up radios, wind up torches, and a waterproof document holder and have been adapted for Cumbria with the help of members of the Mountain Rescue service that were out in the floods last November.

Two recent grants of £35,500 to the Lake District Search and Rescue Association and £3,000 to the Bay Search and Rescue will also be used to train people and train trainers in swift water rescue techniques, ensuring that the county has the skills to deal with any future event.

And some grants have been awarded so that they leave a positive legacy in the community. For example part of a donation from James Walker (£25,000) was used to put lights on the popular Millers footbridge.

Lessons Identified

Key lessons were the need to resource the recovery group with project management and administration support. The first Recovery Coordination meeting was held on 21 November and it was clear more time in recovery training is required. The transition from day to day business mode into immediate action and response was challenging for some of the Senior Managers. This could have been made easier by more focus on training and exercising in recovery.

Offers of help came in thick and fast in the form of expertise, food, money, clothing, tents, portable bridges, volunteers etc. Fortunately, having learnt from the Foot and Mouth Outbreak and the 2005 floods, the Cumbria Community Foundation moved quickly to set up a flood recovery fund to manage donations. It could not have been anticipated how generous donors would be towards the fund and a review will be undertaken of the local authority disaster fund management plans in order to incorporate the learning from this experience.

Voluntary groups established very successful food, clothes and furniture banks with assistance from the Fund and other donations. This allowed the strategic recovery groups to concentrate on other offers of help but this took a team some time to establish systems and dedicated capacity over a number of weeks and months to coordinate the offers and ensure they were channelled to the appropriate recovery group. This system will now be used in future emergencies.

Businesses were also quick to come forward with offers of help and to respond to requests. They should not be overlooked when seeking manpower and resources. Awareness needs to be raised about an increase in “ambulance chasers”, which vary from voluntary agencies not included in our plans and therefore at risk of duplicating effort or responding inappropriately, to commercial companies leaving products on a sale or return basis and then sending invoices on a speculative basis. This will be included in future training.

Contacts for Further Information

emergency.planning@cumbriacc.gov.uk

Mike Smyth
Assistant Director Public Protection
Email: Mike.smyth@cumbriacc.gov.uk