

Long-term impacts of flooding following the winter 2015/16 flooding in North East Scotland: Summary Report

In response to the severe flooding experienced in North-East Scotland during the winter of 2015/16, the Centre of Expertise for Waters (CREW) commissioned a project to;

- (1) develop a better understanding of the long-term impacts of flooding upon people and communities and,
- (2) identify and understand what types of support and advice are needed at different stages of the recovery process.

The research was conducted over a three-year period gaining new insights about the long-term impacts of flooding on people and communities to be identified. These insights informed several considerations for enhancing flood-risk management (before, during, and after a flood), and highlighted how personal and community resilience may be supported.

KEY FINDINGS:

On People

- In the first year after flooding, impacts on participants included;
 - issues arising from long-term use of temporary accommodation,
 - sustained involvement in the reinstatement or refurbishment of their own properties,
 - upset and anxiety arising from flood-related experiences and frequent communications with insurance companies and associated parties, and
 - dealing with unforeseen costs.
- Longer-term (> 3 years after the flood) included;
 - challenges in renewing or securing home insurance at an acceptable price,
 - decisions about, installation and maintenance costs of property-level protection measures,
 - negative impacts on physical and emotional wellbeing (arising from reminders about the winter 2015/16 event), and
 - uncertainty over local future flood risk protection measures/proposals.
- How individuals coped with, and recovered from, flooding was highly varied and not directly related to demographic or other personal attributes. However, certain groups (children, older people, those living alone or with pre-existing stressful life circumstances) were found to be more vulnerable during all flood recovery phases. Individuals within these groups would have benefited from more targeted assistance following the flooding.
- Emergency grants, administered by the local authority, were made available to flooded households and businesses. Grants were also available from national charities and via local fund-raising efforts. This research demonstrated how important, and appreciated, these sources of funding were.
- By the end of the project, participants displayed greater knowledge of how they and their household could be more resilient and better prepared for future flooding by, for example, having prepared a response and evacuation plan.

On Communities and Businesses

- Faced with an emergency situation, communities in North-East Scotland initiated their own immediate response to the winter 2015/16 flooding. Since then, communities have mobilised to develop new, or re-invigorate existing, resilience planning in case of flooding or another type of future emergency.
- Individuals will still be adversely affected by flood events, even if they have experience of, or made preparations following, a previous flood event.
- Flooding affected the entire community. Those whose homes or business premises were not flooded faced practical challenges including disruption to utilities, transport infrastructure and local services.
- Flooding had a serious financial impact on many local businesses, most of which were micro or small enterprises. Some local businesses had never reopened after the flooding. For those still trading, considerable financial losses had been incurred.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Types of support and advice needed at different stages of the long-term recovery process

For those living or working in flood risk areas to avoid or minimise the impacts of flooding

- **BEFORE FLOODING:** People and businesses are advised to be prepared for flooding in the same way that they would routinely

prepare for other household emergencies (such as a fire). In particular, we recommend:

- o having an emergency plan that clearly sets out what actions should be taken in the event of serious flooding including which belongings to take and evacuation protocols;
 - o investigating appropriate property level flood resistance and resilience measures;
 - o ensuring that home/business insurance includes adequate flood cover (i.e. consultation with Flood Re);
 - o registering with Floodline and paying close attention to any notifications;
 - o being aware of actions that could be taken to assist neighbours and vulnerable members of the community when there is risk of flooding.
- DURING FLOODING: People and businesses should be prepared and have evacuation plans organised, including the contact details of emergency services; although being mindful their response may not be immediate due to wider pressures elsewhere.
 - AFTER FLOODING: Assistance from close friends, family and neighbours is particularly beneficial at times when those who have been flooded need to make decisions on issues such as; which damaged belongings should be salvaged, or in compiling inventories of belongings for insurance company records.

For statutory organisations and voluntary agencies who have a role to play in preventing, preparing for, responding and assisting the recovery from flooding

- BEFORE FLOODING: Those who issue flood notifications (such as Flood Alerts, Flood Warnings and Severe Flood Warnings) should ensure that there is clarity over the terminology their notifications use (e.g. warning or alert) and ensure their notifications encourage appropriate action to be taken. Participants in the study thought that public access to local river data was useful and provided reassurance to them and others in their community. We recommend that data be available for as many rivers in flood risk areas as possible.
- BEFORE FLOODING: Home reports, the documents that provide potential property buyers information about a property for sale, should state if a property is located in a flood-risk area, and explicitly state if a property has been flooded. If property level protection measures have been installed these should be identified.
- BEFORE FLOODING: Opportunities to obtain trusted, impartial advice regarding property-level flood-resistance products and options to purchase and install such products should be easily accessible, well-advertised, repeatedly (e.g. every three months), via the local authority or any other authority with the capacity to do so, to householders and businesses
- BEFORE/DURING FLOODING: Information about how a flood event is progressing should be disseminated using a variety of platforms (e.g. print and broadcast media, social media and other online platforms) to ensure that it reaches as many people as possible. Those responsible for disseminating information must be aware that disruption to utilities and telecommunications networks during flood events mean other modes of communication are essential.
- BEFORE/DURING/AFTER FLOODING: Community-led resilience planning efforts require coordinated long term support from statutory agencies, the emergency services etc. to ensure that communities retain long term capacity to respond to a future emergency situation.
- AFTER FLOODING (IMMEDIATELY): Once the need to use an evacuation centre has passed, co-ordinated efforts to collate and disseminate information about temporary accommodation options and their availability would be very useful as many households can find it difficult to identify and secure suitable temporary accommodation after a flood event. It is recommended that local authorities could lead such efforts.
- AFTER FLOODING: Members of the public appreciate regular and honest communication thus information and updates about plans for future flood-related actions should be readily accessible and transparent. Multiple dissemination modes would ensure that information reached as many people as possible.
- AFTER FLOODING: NHS Scotland and associated services should anticipate additional demands for, e.g. GP and counselling services, in communities that have been flooded. Services should be well-advertised and, if possible, they should be delivered within or a short distance away from areas affected by a flood event.
- AFTER FLOODING (IMMEDIATELY): If grants intended to meet some of the costs of installing flood resistance measures are made available to householders and businesses their availability should be well-publicised at the time when those whose homes were flooded are planning and undertaking home refurbishments. Clear use criteria for such grants are required. It is recommended that Scotland wide guidance is developed that could be made available through local authorities or any other authority with the capacity to do so.
- AFTER FLOODING (LONG-TERM): Formal and informal support are warranted in flooded communities and should target the needs of individuals (e.g. one to one counselling), vulnerable groups (e.g. the frail and elderly, those with a disability) and the needs of the wider community (e.g. informal opportunities for people to get together with the option to share their experiences), including both those whose homes were flooded and those whose homes were not affected. Children who experienced severe flooding should be offered support by their school.