

Background and Context

Following three days of exceptionally heavy rain on already saturated ground, the River Ouse overtopped the flood defences and flooded substantial parts of Lewes.

613 residential and 207 business properties were flooded, along with 16 public buildings. 1000 people were displaced. 503 vehicles were damaged or destroyed and the total cost of the flooding was given as £88 million.

How the Topic was Handled

A Business and Employment Sub-Group was appointed, working to the Lewes Flood Recovery Co-ordinating Group. Its Terms of Reference were "To assist the business community and consider the employment implications for individuals." The sub-group met regularly up until June 2001.

Represented on the sub-group were:

- Lewes District Council
- East Sussex County Council
- Sussex Enterprise

Lewes DC invited Sussex Enterprise and the Brighton, Hove & Lewes Enterprise Agency to provide individual advice to flood affected businesses from October 16 onwards. Sussex Enterprise seconded a member of staff to Lewes specifically for this purpose. Regular meetings of the business community were held in the White Hart Hotel in Lewes to discuss issues arising from the flood.

Key points arising were:

- Concern about blighting the town's reputation as a business location.
- Regular meetings in White Hart were very helpful to businesses.
- Need to lobby MP's and Government to provide compensation to individuals, farmers and other businesses that had suffered financial loss and often for valid reasons did not have (full) insurance.
- Support through the new small business service to help businesses draw up business continuity plans received little take-up.
- Enterprise Agency giving advice re. claims, allowances etc. was helpful to businesses.
- Farmers could lose two years of crops – those they were unable to harvest and the forthcoming year because of inability to sow: unlikely to have been able to insure for such a risk.
- Damage to business as external image was that town was a disaster area, however, not all Lewes was closed. Restored external trade by signs on the bypass and in town, publicity, etc. - "Lewes is open for business ". Christmas shopping was the re-launch (Lewes DC gave extra money for advertising).

- Board in Cliffe High St provided identifying which businesses had re-opened.
- Street market provided for those with damaged shops.
- Programme of events to promote the town, eg. Spring programme, Farmers Market, Lewes Festival.
- Sussex Enterprise made bid to Government Office for the South East for Business Advice Service and regeneration scheme.

Lessons Identified

It is important to stress that the floods adversely affected those not only in the lower part of the town but also 'uphill'. Therefore business recovery was a town-wide issue.

Contacts for Further Information

Further information can be obtained from: -

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or

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Additional Documents

[The lewes flood of October 2000: A review of the recovery](#) [External website]