

Topic

Access to and security of sites

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.

Police and crime prevention

Crime prevention has been an important factor in maintaining the welfare of residents in flood-affected areas. Cumbria Constabulary quickly repositioned itself in the immediate aftermath of the floods to ensure effective policing was maintained after two of its main stations in West Cumbria, Workington and Cockermouth, were badly damaged. After many months of operating out of portacabins, both stations are now back open and the rebuilding work is now complete.

As part of ensuring flood affected homes and businesses remained safe and secure from thieves, the police ran dedicated patrols in affected areas and very effective crime prevention campaigns where flood-affected residents were offered free alarms and safety information. The rise in crime normally associated with flooding, such as burglary or theft, has not happened in Cumbria and in fact crime figures have fallen across many flood-affected areas. Twelve months on, this work continues as community officers pay regular visits to flood-hit families and businesses and are supporting successful rebuilding projects across the area. When people move back in to flood-affected properties they are offered Selecta DNA property marking kits.

A local PC led the redevelopment of the flooded allotments at Hall Brow, Workington alongside the probation service, Rotary Club, Town Council and residents of Hall Brow. This work received national acclaim for the way it utilised offenders sentenced to community work.

Cumbria County Council Trading Standards Officers were quickly on the ground advising businesses and householders on the dangers of rogue traders being drawn by the prospect of vulnerable people desperate to get their houses and businesses repaired. This high profile presence helped to deter a lot of this activity and supported the communities through this difficult time.

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.

Contacts for Further Information

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