

Topic

Needs of people - non-health

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.

Throughout 2010, it was important to have an 'on the ground' presence in the worst affected communities. After the emergency reception centres closed, flood support centres took over as the focal point for residents needing help, advice and support. Even after they were wound down, people were still able to receive support through other channels. Community workers from the county and district councils and other agencies helped co-ordinate the work of the Flood Action Groups, voluntary sector partners and other groups assisting vulnerable residents to get back into their homes. Community units have played a vital part in providing informal psychological and emotional support, helping large numbers of residents through the complexities of applying for the grants on offer; 'hand holding' and brokering better outcomes where residents have encountered hard-to-solve insurance issues for both buildings re-instatement and contents.

It is estimated that 85-90% of the people living in Cockermouth's 691 flooded residential properties have now permanently returned to their homes. The main influencing factor in those cases where people have not yet returned has been a problem in their insurance/building reinstatement process.

The free flood warning service Floodline Warnings Direct was extended to an extra 3,000 homes and businesses in Cumbria in February 2010, which means there are now 9,300 properties registered to receive free flood warnings in Cumbria.

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.

Communities were resilient and where they were organised prior to the flooding there were able to respond quickly and efficiently alongside the emergency services. Keswick Flood Action Group staffed by volunteers was able to check on the welfare of local people, move furniture upstairs and deal with all kinds of trauma.

Emergency plans need to dovetail in a way that supports this community resilience. Prior to the flooding there were 12 flood action groups, now there are an additional 18 providing an enormous opportunity to maximise the communities' contribution alongside the emergency services and public sector. Three training events have recently been held around the county bringing these partners together to raise awareness of the Plans that are in place and to improve the working on the ground in future. It is important that community groups are involved during the acute phase as they can provide valuable information to rescuers and to ensure that the community does not feel excluded from the activity.

Contacts for Further Information

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